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3 vols

Braddon

ALL ALONG THE RIVER

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"ISHMAEL," "VIXEN," "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET,"
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. I.

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ALL ALONG THE RIVER.

CHAPTER I.

"THE RAIN SET EARLY IN TO-NIGHT."

It had been raining all the morning, and it was raining still, in that feeble and desultory manner which presages a change of some kind, when the postman came with the long-expected Indian letter.

He was later than usual. It was nearly two o'clock, and Isola had been watching for him since one, watching with an unread book in her lap, listening for the click of the gate. She had been sitting by the open window, looking out at the wet landscape, the glistening hedgerow and dull grey river, with the great, green hill beyond, a steep slope of meadow land,

dotted with red cattle, and so divided by hedge-rows, as to look like a Titanic chessboard.

At last she heard the familiar tread of the postman's heavy boots, and saw his shining oil-skin hat moving above the edge of the hollies, and heard the click of the iron latch as he came into the little garden.

She called to him from the window, and he came tramping across the sodden grass and put three letters into her outstretched hand.

One from her married sister in Hans Place. That would keep. One from an old schoolfellow. That would keep. And one—the long-looked-for Indian letter, which she tore open eagerly, and read hurriedly, devouring the close lines, in the neat, black penmanship, with its decided up and down strokes, and legible characters, so firm, so strong, so straightforward, like the nature of the man who wrote the letter.

The tears sprang to her eyes as she came to the end, and her hands crushed the thin paper in a paroxysm of vexation or despair.

"Six months—perhaps a year, before he can come back, and I am to go on living here—alone, unless I like to send for a girl whose face

I hardly know, to keep me company, and cheer me with her good spirits. I want no strange girls. I want no one's good spirits. I hate people with good spirits. I want him, and nobody but him! It is hard that we should be parted like this. I ought to have gone with him, in spite of all the doctors in Christendom."

She relented towards the letter which her feverish hand had used so badly. She smoothed out the flimsy paper carefully with that pretty little hand, and then she re-read the husband's letter, so full of grave tenderness and fond, consoling words.

He was with his regiment in Burmah, and the present aspect of things gave him no hope of being able to return to England for the next half-year, and there was no certainty that the half-year might not be stretched into a whole year. The separation could not be more irksome to his dearest Isola than it was to him, her husband of little more than a year: but not for worlds would he have exposed her to the risks of that climate. He took comfort in thinking of her in the snug little Cornish nest, with his good Tabitha.

Isola kissed the letter before she put it in her pocket, and then she looked round the room rather dolefully, as if the Cornish nest were not altogether paradise. And yet it was a pretty little room enough, half dining-room, half study, with handsomely bound books on carved oak shelves, and photographs and bright draperies, and cosily-cushioned bamboo chairs, and a bird-cage, and a Persian cat. Nor was the garden outside flowerless, even on the threshold of winter. The purple blossoms of the veronica were untouched by frost; there were pale tea roses gleaming yonder against the dark gloss of holly and laurel. There were star-shaped single dahlias of vividest red, like spots of flame; and close under the open window, last splendour of departed summer, the waxen chalice of a lilium auratum trembled on its tall stem, and filled the room with perfume.

The rain was over—the monotonous drip, drip, which had irritated Isola's nerves all that morning, had ceased at last. She left the modest little lunch untouched upon the table, and went out into the hall, where her hat and jacket hung handy for any impromptu ramble. No need to look at one's self in the glass before going out of

doors, at twenty years of age, and in such a place as Trelasco. Isola took her stick from the stand, a green orange stick, bought in the sunny South, on her way to Venice with her husband last year, a leisurely trip, which had been to them as a second honeymoon after a few happy months of wedlock. Then had come the sadness of parting, and a swift and lonely return journey for the young wife—a lonely return to the Angler's Nest, Trelasco, that cosy cottage between Lostwithiel and Fowey, which Major Disney had bought and furnished before his marriage. He was a son of the soil, and he had chosen to pitch his tent in that remote spot for the sake of old associations, and from a fixed belief that there was no locality of equal merit for health, beauty, and all other virtues which a man should seek in his home.

Isola rarely touched that stick without remembering the day it was bought—a rainy day in Milan—just such a day as this, a low, grey sky, and an oppressive mildness of atmosphere. She remembered, with the sick pain that goes with long partings, how she and her husband had dawdled away an afternoon in the Victor Emmanuel Gallery, buying handkerchiefs and

neckties, a book or two, a collection of photographs, and finally the orange stick.

She went out to walk down her depression before tea-time, if possible. She went along a narrow path by the river, then turned into a road that skirted those green pastures which rose sheer till the ragged edge of the topmost boundary seemed to touch the dim, grey sky. She passed the village inn, deadly quiet at this season and at this hour. She passed the half-dozen decent cottages, and the three or four genteeler houses, each in its neatly kept garden, and she walked with quick, light step along the wet road, her useful tailor-gown well clear of the mud, her stick striking the hedge-row now and then, as she swung it to and fro in dreamy thought.

A long, lonely winter to look forward to—a winter like the last—with her books and drawing-board, and her cottage piano, and the cat and the fox-terriers, and Tabitha for her daily companions. There were a few neighbours within a radius of half a dozen miles, who had been very civil to her; who called upon her, say once in six weeks; who sometimes invited her to a stately

dinner-party, and sometimes at a suspiciously short notice, which made her feel she was wanted to fill a gap; who made her free of their tennis lawns; and who talked to her on Sundays after church, and were always very particular in inquiring for any news from India. There was not one among them for whom she cared; not one to whom she would have liked to pour out her thoughts about Keats or Shelley, or to whom she would have confided her opinion of Byron. She was more interested in Bulwer's "Audley Egerton" than in any of those flesh and blood neighbours. She was happier sitting by her chimney corner with a novel than in the best society available within a drive of Trelasco.

She struck off the high road into a lane, a lane that led to the base of a wilder hill than that where the red cattle were grazing. The crest of the hill was common land, and dark fir-trees made a waving line against the autumn sky, and the view from the summit was wide and varied, with a glimpse of the great brown cliffs and the dark, grey sea far off to the west, to that dim distance where the Dodman shut off the watery way to the new world. On the landward slope of

that wild-looking ridge was the Mount, Lord Lostwithiel's place, uninhabited for the greater part of the year except by servants, his lordship being the very last kind of man to bury himself alive in a remote Cornish fastness, a long day's journey from the London theatres, and the R. Y. S. Clubhouse at Cowes.

Who was Lord Lostwithiel? Well, in the estimation of Trelasco he was the only nobleman in England, or say that he was to all other peers as the sun to the planets. He belonged to Trelasco by reason of his large landed estate and the accident of his birth, which had taken place at the Mount; and, although his character and way of life were not altogether satisfactory to the village mind, Trelasco made the best of him.

Isola Disney climbed the hill, an easy matter to light-footed twenty. She stood amidst the tall fir columns, and looked down at the November landscape, very distinctly defined in the soft, grey atmosphere. She could see the plough moving slowly across the red earth in the fields below, the clumsy farm horses, white against the deep, rich red. She could see the winding river, bluish grey, between its willowy banks, and far

off beyond Fowey wooded hills, where the foliage showed orange, and tawny, and russet, and dun colour between the blue-grey water, and the pale grey sky.

She loved this wild, lonely hill, and felt her spirits rise in this lighter atmosphere as she stood resting against the scaly trunk of a Scotch fir, with the wind blowing her hair. It was a relief to escape from the silence of those empty rooms, where she had only the sleepy Persian or the hyper-intelligent fox-terrier for company. There was a longer and more picturesque way home than that by which she had come. She could descend the other side of the hill, skirt the gardens of the Mount, by a path that led through the Park to a lodge gate on the Fowey road. It was one of her favourite walks, and she was so accustomed to seeing the shutters closed at the great house that she never expected to meet any one more alarming than a farm servant or a cottager's child upon the footpath.

There was a thick chestnut copse upon one side, and the wide expanse of undulating turf, with an occasional clump of choice timber, upon the other. The house stood on higher ground

than the park, but was hemmed in and hidden by shrubberies that had overgrown the intention of the landscape gardener who planned them. Only the old grey-stone gables, with their heavy slabs of slate, and the tall, clustered chimneys, showed above the copper beeches, and deodaras, the laurels, and junipers, and Irish yews, and the shining masses of arbutus with their crimson berries gleaming amongst the green. Isola had never seen that old Manor House nearer than she saw it to-day, from the path, which was a public right of way through the park. She knew that the greater part of the building dated from the reign of Charles the Second, but that there were older bits; and that about the whole, and about those ancient rooms and passages most especially, there were legends and traditions and historical associations, not without the suspicion of ghosts. The Mount was not a show place, like the home of the Treffrys at Fowey, and of late years it had been very seldom inhabited, except by certain human fossils who had served the house of Hulbert for two generations. She had often looked longingly at those quaint old gables, those clustered stone chimneys, likening the house amidst

its overgrown shrubberies to the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty, and had wished that she were on friendly terms with one of those drowsy old retainers.

"I dare say if I were daring enough to open one of the doors and go in I should find them all asleep," she thought, "and I might roam all over the house from cellar to garret without awakening anybody." She was too depressed to-day to give more than a careless, unseeing glance at those many gables as she walked along the muddy path beside the dripping copse. The chestnut boughs were nearly bare, but here and there clusters of bright yellow leaves were still hanging, shining like pale gold in the last watery gleams of the sun; and though the leaves were lying sodden and brown among the rank, wet grass, there were emerald mosses and cool, green ferns, and red and orange fungi to give colour to the foreground, and to the little vistas that opened here and there amidst the underwood.

Those final yellow gleams were fading low down in the western sky as Isola turned her face towards the river and the Angler's Nest, and

just above that pale radiance there stretched a dense black cloud, like a monstrous iron bar, which she felt must mean mischief. She looked at that black line apprehensively. She was three miles from home, without cloak or umbrella, and with no available shelter within three-quarters of a mile.

She quickened her pace, watching the fading light and lowering cloud, expecting thunder, lightning, hail, she knew not what. A sudden deluge settled the question. Torrential rain! That was the meaning of the inky bar above the setting sun. She looked round her helplessly. Should she dart into the copse, and try to shelter herself amidst those leafless twigs, those slender withies and saplings? Better to face the storm and plod valiantly on. Her neat little cloth gown would not be much the worse for a ducking; her neat little feet were accustomed to rapid walking. Should she run? No; useless when there were three miles to be got over. A brisk, steady tramp would be better. But, brave as she was, that fierce rain was far from pleasant. It cut into her eyes and blinded her. She had to grope her way along the path with her stick.

"Pray let me take you to the house," said a voice close beside her, a man's voice—low and deep, and with the accents of refinement.

Could one of Lord Lostwithiel's fossilized servants talk like that? Impossible. She looked up, as well as she could, under that blinding downpour, and saw a tall man standing beside the pathway with his back to the copse. He was over six feet two and of slim, active figure. He was pale, and wore a short, dark beard, and the eyes which looked at Isola out of the pale, thin face were very dark. That was about as much as she could see of the stranger in the November dusk.

"Pray, let me persuade you to come to the house," he said urgently. "You are being drenched. It is absolutely dreadful to see anybody out in such rain—and there is no other shelter within reach. Let me take you there. My housekeeper will dry your hat and jacket for you. I ought to introduce myself, perhaps. I am Lord Lostwithiel."

She had guessed as much. Who else would speak with authority in that place? She dimly recalled a photograph, pale and faded,

of a tall man in a yeomanry uniform, seen in somebody's album; and the face of the photograph had been the same elongated oval face —with long thin nose, and dark eyes a shade too near together—which was looking down at her anxiously now.

She felt it would be churlish to refuse shelter so earnestly offered.

"You are very kind," she faltered. "I am sorry to be so troublesome. I ought not to have come so far in such doubtful weather."

She went with him meekly, walking her fastest under the pelting rain, which was at her back now as they made for the house.

"Have you really come far?" he asked.

"From Trelasco. I live at the Angler's Nest, a cottage by the river. You know it, perhaps?"

"Yes. I know every house at Trelasco. Then you are staying with Mrs. Disney, I presume?"

"I am Mrs. Disney."

"You?"—with intense surprise. "I beg your pardon. You are so young. I imagined Mrs. Disney an older person."

He glanced at the girlish figure, the pale

delicate face, and told himself that his new acquaintance could scarcely be more than nineteen or twenty. He had met Major Disney, a man who looked about forty—a lucky fellow to have caught such a pretty bird as this.

They had reached the shrubbery by this time, and were hurrying along a winding walk where the rain reached them with less violence. The narrow walk brought them on to a broad terrace in front of the house. Lostwithiel opened a half-glass door, and led Mrs. Disney into the library, a long low room, full of curious nooks and corners, formed by two massive chimney-pieces, and by the projecting wings of the heavy oak bookcases. Isola had never seen any room so filled with books, nor had she ever seen a room with two such chimney-pieces, of statuary marble, yellowed with age, elaborately carved with cherubic heads, and Cupids, and torches and festal wreaths, bows and arrows, lyres and urns.

A wood fire was burning upon one hearth, and it was hither Lostwithiel brought his guest, wheeling a large armchair in front of the blaze.

"If you will take off your hat and jacket, and sit down there, I'll get my housekeeper to attend to you," he said, with his hand upon the bell.

"You are more than kind. I must hurry home directly the rain abates a little. I have a careful old servant who is sure to be anxious about me," said Isola, devouring the room with greedy eyes, wanting to take in every detail of this enchanted castle.

She might never enter it again, perhaps. Lord Lostwithiel was so seldom there. His absenteeism was the lament of the neighbourhood. The things he ought to have done and did not do would have filled a book. He had been wild in his youth. He had once owned a theatre. He had done, or was supposed to have done, things which were spoken of with bated breath; but of late years he had developed new ambitions, and had done with theatrical speculations. He had become literary, scientific, political. He was one of the lights of the intellectual world, or of that small section of the intellectual world which is affiliated to the smart world. He knew all the clever people in

London, and a good many of the intellectualities of Paris, Berlin, and Vienna. He had never married; but it was supposed that he would eventually marry, before he was forty, for instance, and that he would make a great match. He was not rich, but he was Lord Lostwithiel. He was by no means handsome, but he was said to be one of the most fascinating men in London.

Isola pulled off her jacket slowly, looking about her all the time; and Lostwithiel forbore from offering her any assistance lest he should intensify her evident shyness.

A man in plain clothes, who looked more like a valet than a butler, answered the bell.

"Send Mrs. Mayne, and bring tea," ordered his lordship.

What a slender, girlish form it was which the removal of the tweed jacket revealed. The slim waist and somewhat narrow shoulders betokened a delicacy of constitution. The throat was beautiful, milk white, the throat of Diana, and the head, now the hat was off, would also have done for Diana; a small classic head, with soft, brown hair drawn smoothly away from the low,

white brow and rolled into a knot at the back. The features were as delicate as the complexion, in which there was no brilliancy of colouring, only a paleness as of ivory. The eyes were dark grey, with long brown lashes, and their present expression was between anxiety and wondering interest. Lostwithiel was not such a coxcomb as to appropriate that look of interest. He saw that it was his house and not himself which inspired the feeling.

"You like old houses, I can see, Mrs. Disney," he said, smiling at her.

"Intensely. They are histories in brick and stone, are they not? I dare say there are stories about this room."

"Innumerable stories. I should have to ransack the Record Office for some of them, and to draw upon a very bad memory to a perilous extent for others."

"Is it haunted?"

"I am not one of those privileged persons who see ghosts; neither seventh son of a seventh son; nor of the mediumistic temperament; but I have heard of an apparition pervading the house on occasions, and being seen in this room, which

is one of the older rooms, a part of that building which was once a grange appertaining to a certain small monastery, put down by Henry VIII., and recorded in the Black Book. As one of the oldest rooms it is naturally uncanny; but as I have never suffered any inconvenience in that line, I make it my den."

"It is the most picturesque room I ever saw. And what a multitude of books!" exclaimed Isola.

"Yes; I have a good many books. I am always buying; but I find I never have exactly the book I want. And as I have no librarian I am too apt to forget the books I have. If I could afford to spend more of my life at the Mount, I would engage some learned gentleman, whose life had been a failure, to take care of my books. Are you Cornish, like your husband, Mrs. Disney?"

"No. I was born at Dinan."

"What! in that mediæval Breton city? You are not French, though, I think?"

"My mother and father were both English, but my sister and I were born and brought up in Brittany."

Lostwithiel questioned no further. He had a shrewd idea that when English people live for a good many years in a Breton town they have reasons of their own, generally financial, for their choice of a settlement. He was a man who could not have spent six months of his life away from London or Paris.

The housekeeper made her appearance and offered her services. She wrung the rain out of Isola's cloth skirt, and wiped the muddy hem. She took charge of the jacket and hat, and at Lostwithiel's suggestion she remained to pour out the tea. She was a very dignified person, in a black silk gown and a lace cap, and she treated her master as if he had been a demi-god. Isola could not be afraid of taking tea in this matronly presence, yet she kept looking nervously towards the window in front of her, where the rain beat with undiminished force, and where the darkening sky told of impending night.

"I see you are anxious to be on your way home, Mrs. Disney," said Lostwithiel, who had nothing to do but watch her face, such an expressive face at all times, so picturesquely

beautiful when touched by the flickering light of the wood fire. "If you were to wait for fine weather you might be here all night, and your good people at home would be frantic. I'll order a carriage, and you can be at home in three-quarters of an hour."

"Oh no, Lord Lostwithiel, I couldn't give you so much trouble. If your housekeeper will be so kind as to lend me a cloak and umbrella, I can get home very well. And I had better start at once."

"In the rain, alone, and in the darkness? It will be dark before you are home, in any case. No, Mrs. Disney, if I were to permit such a thing I should expect Major Disney to call me out directly he came home. He is in India, I think?"

"He is with his regiment in Burmah."

"Do you expect him home soon?"

"Not very soon; not for six months, or perhaps longer. It was that which made me walk so far."

Lostwithiel looked puzzled.

"I mean that I was so disappointed by his letter—a letter I received to-day—that I went

out for a long ramble to walk down my bad spirits if I could, and hardly knew how far I was going. It has made me inflict trouble on you, and Mrs. ——"

"Mayne. Both Mrs. Mayne and I are delighted to be of use to you. Order the station brougham, Dalton, immediately," to the man who answered his bell. "The carriage can hardly be ready in less than twenty minutes, so pray try to do justice to Mrs. Mayne's tea."

"It is delicious tea," said Isola, enjoying the fire-glow, and the dancing lights upon the richly bound books in all their varieties of colouring, from black and crimson and orange-tawny to creamy vellum.

She was evidently relieved in her mind by the knowledge that she was to be driven home presently.

"If you are really interested in this old house you must come some sunny morning and let Mrs. Mayne show you over it," said Lostwithiel, establishing himself with his cup and saucer upon the other side of the hearth. "She knows all the old stories, and she has a better memory than I."

"I should like so much to do so next summer, when my husband can come with me."

"I'm afraid Major Disney won't care much about the old place. He is a native of these parts, and must have been here often in my father's time. I shall hope to receive you both, if I am here next October for the shooting—but there is no need to relegate your inspection of the house to the remote future. Come on the first fine morning that you have nothing better to do. Mrs. Mayne is always at home; and I am almost always out of doors in the morning. You can have the house to yourselves, and talk about ghosts to your hearts' content."

"Oh, my lord, I hope I know better than to say anything disrespectful of the house," protested Mrs. Mayne.

"My dear Mayne, a family ghost is as respectable an institution as a family tree."

Isola murmured some vague acknowledgment of his civility. She was far too shy to have any idea of taking advantage of his offer. To reenter that house alone of her own accord would be impossible. By-and-by, with her husband at her side, she would be bold enough to do any-

thing, to accept any hospitality that Lostwithiel might be moved to offer. He would invite Martin, perhaps, for the shooting, or to a luncheon, or a dinner. She wondered vaguely if she would ever possess a gown good enough to wear at a dinner-party in such a house.

After this there came a brief silence. Mrs. Mayne stood straight and prim behind the tea-table. Nothing would have induced her to sit in his lordship's presence, albeit she had dandled him in her arms when there was much less of him than of the cambric and fine flannel which composed his raiment, and albeit his easy familiarity might have invited some forgetfulness of class distinctions. Mrs. Mayne fully understood that she was wanted there to set the stranger at her ease, and she performed her mission; but even her presence could not lessen Isola's shyness. She felt like a bird caught in a net, or fluttering in the grasp of some strong but kindly hand. She sat listening for carriage wheels, and only hearing the dull thumping of her own scared heart.

And yet he was so kind, and yet he so fully realized her idea of high-bred gentleness, that

she need hardly have been so troubled by the situation. She stole a glance at him as he stood by the chimney-piece, in a thoughtful attitude, looking down at the burning logs on the massive old andirons. The firelight shining on a face above it will often give a sinister look to the openest countenance; and to-night Lostwithiel's long, narrow face, dark, deep-set eyes, and pointed beard had some touch of the diabolical in that red and uncertain glow; an effect that was but instantaneous, for as the light changed the look passed, and she saw him as he really was, with his pale and somewhat sunken cheeks, and eyes darkly grave, of exceeding gentleness.

"Have you lived long at the Angler's Nest, Mrs. Disney?" he asked, at last.

"Nearly a year and a half; ever since my marriage, with just one interval on the Continent before Martin went to India."

"Then I need not ask if you are heartily sick of the place?"

"Indeed, I should not be tired of the cottage or the neighbourhood if my husband were at home. I am only tired of solitude. He wants

me to send for his sister—a girl who has not long left school—to keep me company; but I detest school girls, and I would much rather be alone than put up with a silly companion."

"You are wise beyond your years, Mrs. Disney. Avoid the sister, by all means. She would bore you to death—a scampering, exuberant girl, who would develop hysteria after one month of Cornish dulness. Besides, I am sure you have resources of your own, and that you would rather endure solitude than uncongenial company."

Isola sighed, and shook her head rather dolefully, tracing the pattern of the Persian rug with the point of her stick.

"I am very fond of books, and of music," she said; "but one gets tired of being alone after a time. It seems such ages since Martin and I said good-bye in Venice. I was dreadfully unhappy at first. I stand almost alone in the world, when I am parted from him."

"Your father and mother are dead?" in gentlest inquiry.

"Oh no; they are not dead; they are at Dinan," she said, almost as if it were the same thing.

"And that is very far from Trelasco."

"They never leave Dinan. The kind of life suits them. Mamma knits; papa has his club and his English newspapers. People enjoy the English papers so much more when they live abroad than when they are at home. Mamma is a very bad sailor. It would be a risk for her to cross. If my sister or I were dangerously ill, mamma would come. But it would be at the hazard of her life. Papa has often told me so."

"And your father, is he a bad sailor?"

"He is rather worse than mamma."

"Then I conclude you were married at Dinan?"

"Oh yes; I never left Brittany until my wedding-day."

"What a pretty idea. It is as if Major Disney had found a new kind of wild flower in some nook or cranny of the old grey wall that guards the town."

"You know Dinan?"

"There are very few places within easy reach of a yachtsman that I don't know. I have anchored in almost every bay between Cherbourg

and Brest, and have rambled inland whenever there was anything worth seeing within a day's journey from the coast. Yes, I know Dinan well. Strange to think that I may have passed you in the street there. Do you sketch, by the way?"

"A little."

"Ah, then, perhaps you are one of the young ladies I have seen sitting at street corners, or under archways, doing fearful and wonderful things with a box of moist colours and a drawing-board."

"The young ladies who sit about the streets are tourists," said Isola, with a look of disgust.

"I understand. The resident ladies would no more do such things than they would sit upon the pavement and make pictures of salmon or men-of-war in coloured chalks, like our Metropolitan artists."

"I think I hear a carriage," said Isola, putting down her cup and saucer, and looking at her jacket, which Mrs. Mayne was holding before the fire.

"Yes, that is the carriage," answered Lostwithiel, opening the glass door. "What a night!

The rain is just as bad as it was when I brought you indoors."

"If you will accept the use of a shawl, ma'am, it would be safer than putting on this damp jacket."

"Yes, Mayne, get your shawl. Mrs. Disney will wear it, I know."

The housekeeper bustled out, and Lostwithiel and his guest were alone, looking at each other somewhat helplessly, as they stood far apart, she in the glow of the hearth, he in the darkness near the door, and feeling that every available subject of conversation had been exhausted. Their embarrassment was increased when Dalton and a footman came in with two great lamps and flooded the room with light.

"I hardly know how to thank you for having taken so much trouble about me," Isola faltered presently, under that necessity to say something which is one of the marks of shyness.

"There has been no trouble. I only hope I got you out of that pelting rain in time to save you from any evil consequences. Strange that our acquaintance should begin in such an accidental manner. I shall be glad to know more

of Major Disney when he comes home, and in the meantime I hope I shall have the pleasure of meeting you sometimes. No doubt you know everybody in the neighbourhood, so we can hardly help running against each other somewhere."

Isola smiled faintly, thinking that the chances of any such meeting were of the slightest; but she did not gainsay him. He wanted to say something courteous no doubt, and had gone into no nice question of probabilities before he spoke. She had heard him described by a good many people, who had hinted darkly at his shortcomings, but had all agreed as to his politeness and persuasive powers.

"A man who would talk over Satan himself," said the village lawyer.

Mrs. Mayne re-appeared with a comfortable shepherd's plaid shawl, which she wrapped carefully about Mrs. Disney, in a pleasant, motherly fashion. The rain had all been shaken off the little felt hat, which had no feathers or frippery to spoil. People who live in the West of England make their account with wet weather.

Lord Lostwithiel handed his guest into the carriage, and stood bareheaded in the rain to wish her good-bye before he shut the door.

"I shall be very anxious to know that you have escaped cold," he said, at the last moment. "I hope you won't think me a nuisance if I call to-morrow to inquire."

He shut the door quickly, and the brougham drove off before she could answer. She was alone in the darkness in the snug, warm little carriage. There was a clock ticking beside her, a sound that startled her in the stillness. There was a basket hanging in front of her, and an odour of cigars and Russia leather. There was a black bear rug, lined with white fleeciness, which almost filled the carriage. She had never sat in such a carriage. How different from the mouldy old brougham in which she occasionally went to dinner-parties—a capacious vehicle with a bow window, like a seaside parlour.

She leant back in a corner of the little carriage, wrapped in the soft, warm rug, wondering at her strange adventure. She had penetrated that mysterious house on Black-fir Hill, and she had made the acquaintance of Lord

Lostwithiel. How much she would have to tell Martin in her next letter. She wrote to him every week—a long, loving letter, closely written on thin paper, pouring out all her fancies and feelings to the husband she loved with all her heart.

She sighed as her thoughts recurred to the letter received to-day. Six months, or perhaps even a year, before he was to come back to her! Yet the letter had not been without hopefulness. He had the prospect of getting his next step before that year was over, and then his coming home would be a final return. He would be able to retire, and he would buy some land—a hundred acres or so—and breed horses—one of his youthful dreams—and do a little building, perhaps, to enlarge and beautify the Angler's Nest, and his Isola should have a pair of ponies and a good saddle-horse. He looked forward to a life of unalloyed happiness.

CHAPTER II.

"BUT THE DAYS DROP ONE BY ONE."

NEXT morning was bright and clear, a morning so soft and balmy that the month might have been mistaken for September. Isola ran down to the garden in her neat little morning frock and linen collar, and ran about among the shrubs and late autumn flowers in a much gayer mood than that of yesterday. She loved her garden—small and modest as it was in comparison with the grounds and gardens of her county neighbours—and on a morning like this it was rapture to her to run from flower to flower, and from shrub to shrub, with her great garden scissors in her hand, and her garden basket hanging over her arm, clipping a withered leaf or a fading flower every here and there, or plucking up those little groundsel plants which seem the perpetual expression of the earth's fertility.

Alas! those pale tea-roses, those saffron and flame-coloured dahlias, meant the last crumbs of summer's plenteous feast. Soon winter and barrenness would spread over the poor little garden; but even in the chill dark heart of mid-winter those graceful conifers and shining laurels, the vermillion on the holly bushes, the crimson of the hawthorn berries would give beauty to the scene; and then would come the return of Persephone with her hands full of gold, the abundant gold of crocus and daffodil, jonquil and pale primrose, the rain of yellow blossoms which heralds the spring.

Half a year did not seem such an appalling interval—nay, even the thought of a year of waiting did not scare her so much this morning in the sunlight and fresh clear air as yesterday in the grey dim rain. What an improvement Martin would find in the garden, should he return before the end of the summer! How tall those Irish yews had grown by the gate yonder, a pair of dark green obelisks keeping stately guard over the modest wooden gate; and the escalonia hedge that screened the kitchen garden was two feet higher since the spring! How the

juniper at the corner of the grass plot had shot up and thickened! Arbutus, laurel, ribes, everything had been growing as shrubs only grow in the south and south-west of England. What a darling garden it was, and how full of pleasure her life would be by-and-by, when Martin was able to settle down and buy land, and give her a little herd of Jersey cows. She had always envied the farmers' wives in that fertile valley of the Rance, where her childhood had been passed. And how delightful to have her own cows and her own farmyard, and a pony-carriage to drive up and down the hilly Cornish lanes and into the narrow little street of Fowey, and to ride her own horse by her husband's side for long exploring rambles among those wild hills towards Mevagissey.

She had only to wait patiently for a year or less, and that bright life might be hers. She had no frivolous vanities, no craving for dissipations and fine clothes, no fatal thirst for "smartness." Her ideas were essentially modest. She had never envied her sister, who had married a rich stockbroker, and whose brand new red-brick house in Hans Place towered above surrounding

Chelsea as much as her diamonds eclipsed the jewels of other middle-class matrons at the festal gatherings of South Kensington and Bayswater. Gwendolen had married for wealth. Isola had married for love. She had given her girlish affection to a man who was nearly thirty years her senior, her heart going out to him innocently almost at the beginning of their acquaintance, first because he was a soldier, and in her mind a hero, and secondly because he was kinder to her than anybody else had ever been.

He was her first admirer. That delicate loveliness, as of some woodland flower, which distinguished Isola from the herd of women, had been still in embryo when Major Disney spent a summer holiday between Dinard and Dinan. She had scarcely ranked as a pretty girl two years ago. The slight figure was denounced as scraggy; the pale face was voted sickly; and the delicate features were spoken of as insignificant. Gwendolen's big fair face, with its healthy roses and lilies, her bright hair, and well-developed figure had completely overshadowed the younger sister. Martin Disney was the first man upon whom Isola's low-toned beauty had any power.

He was drawn to her from the very beginning. She listened so prettily, with such a bewitching modesty and almost tremulous pleasure, when he talked to her, as they sat side by side on the club ground at Dinard, watching Gwendoline playing tennis, superb in striped flannel of delicate pink and cream colour. He could hardly believe that those two were sisters. Isola so slim and fragile, of such an ethereal prettiness, owing so little to colouring, and nothing to redundancy of form.

He was told that Miss Manwaring was engaged to one of the richest men in London. That, of course, was a gossip's fable, but it was an established fact that Mr. Hazelrigg had made a considerable fortune in South American railways, water works, and other public improvements, and could afford to make a liberal settlement.

He showed no indisposition to be generous to his handsome sweetheart. He settled seven hundred a year upon her, and told her that she could spend as much of that income as she liked upon toilet and pocket-money, and that he would invest her surplus advantageously for her.

The two sisters were married on the same day

to husbands who were their seniors by seven and twenty years in one instance, by more than thirty years in the other. Daniel Hazlerigg had passed his jubilee birthday when he led Miss Manwaring to the altar; but he was a fine-looking man, straight and tall, like his bride, with a ruddy complexion and iron-grey moustache, and an air and bearing that savoured rather of the mess-room than the city. He had been on the Stock Exchange ever since he came of age; but he had made it the study of his life not to look city or to talk city. Nothing could tempt him to expatiate upon the money market outside his office. He would talk sport, travel, politics—even literature, of which he knew very little—but not stocks and shares, Nicaraguas, or Reading and Philadelphias, Mexican Street Railways, or Patagonian Building Society.

Isola read her sister's glowing descriptions of dinners and routs, gowns by Worth or Cresser, suppers for two hundred people at a guinea a head, from Gunter, waggon-loads of cut roses from Cheshunt or Cheam, and felt no thrill of longing, no pang of envy. Life in the Angler's

Nest might be dull; but it was only dull because Martin was away. She would have felt more solitary in Hans Place, had she accepted Gwendoline's invitation to spend her Christmas there, than she would feel in the cottage by the river, even with no better company than Tabitha, Shah, and Tim. She was essentially shy and retiring. Her girlhood had been spent in a very narrow world, among people whom she seemed to have known all her life; for while Gwendoline, who was six years older, and had been "out" for four years before she married, joined in all the little gaities of the place, and was always making new acquaintance, Isola, who was not "out," spent her days for the most part in a dreamy old, half-neglected garden on the slope of the hill that looks across the Rance towards the unseen sea. The view from that garden was one of the finest in Western France; and it was Isola's delight to sit in a little berceau at the end of a terrace walk, with her books and work-basket and drawing-board, all through the long tranquil summer day, in a silence broken by the sound of wheels and horses' feet on the viaduct and bridge two or three hundred feet below, or

by the muffled music of the organ in the convent chapel.

Tim, the fox-terrier, and Shah, the Persian cat, were both on the lawn with their mistress this morning. They were not friendly towards each other, but preserved an armed neutrality. Tim chased every stray strange cat with a fury that threatened annihilation; and he always looked as if he would like to give chase to Shah, when that dignified piece of fluff moved slowly across the lawn before him with uplifted tail that seemed to wave defiance; but he knew that any attack upon that valued personage would entail punishment and disgrace. Isola loved both these animals—the cat a wedding-present from an old Breton lady in Dinan, the terrier her husband's parting legacy. "Take care of Tim," he had said, the day they parted on board the P. & O. at Venice.

The dog loved his mistress vehemently and obtrusively, leaping into her lap at the slightest sign of indulgence in her eye. The cat suffered himself to be adored, receiving all attentions with a sleepy complacency.

It was only half-past eight, and the world was looking its freshest. There was an opening in the shrubbery that let in a view of the river, and just in front of this opening there was a rustic bench on which Major Disney liked to smoke his after-breakfast pipe or after-dinner cigar. The garden contained very little over two acres, but it was an old garden, and there were some fine old trees, which must have shaded hoops and powder, and pig-tails and knee-breeches. Major Disney had done a good deal in the way of planting wherever there was room for improvement, and he had secured to himself an elderly gardener of exceptional industry, who worked in the garden as if he loved it. Tabitha, again, was one of those wonderful women who know all about everything except books; and she, too, loved the garden, and helped at weeding and watering, in seasons of pressure. Thus it had come to pass that these two acres of velvet lawn and flower-bed, shrubbery, and trim, old-fashioned garden had acquired a reputation in Trelasco, and people frequently complimented Mrs. Disney about her garden.

She was proud of their praises, remembering

the straggling rose-bushes and lavender, and unkempt flower-beds, and overgrown cabbages, and loose shingly paths in that old garden at Dinan, which she had loved despite its neglected condition. Her house at Trelasco was just as superior to the house at Dinan, as garden was to garden. She often thought of her old home, the shabby square house, with walls and shutters of dazzling white, shining brown floors, and worn-out furniture of the Empire period, furniture which had been shabby and out of repair when Colonel Manwaring took the house furnished, intending to spend a week or two in retirement at Dinan with his wife and her first-born, a chubby little girl of five. They had lost a promising boy of a year old, and the colonel, having no reason for living anywhere in particular, and very little to live upon, thought that residence in a foreign country would improve his wife's health and spirits. He had been told that Dinan was picturesque and cheap; and he had put himself and his family on board the *St. Malo* steamer and had gone out like an emigrant to push his fortunes in a strange land. He had even an idea that he might get "something to do" in Dinan—

a secretaryship of a club, an agency, or managerial post of some kind, never having cultivated the art of self-examination so far as to discover that he must have proved utterly incapable, had any such occasion presented itself.

The occasion never did present itself. The one English club existent at Dinan in those days was amply provided with the secretarial element. There was nothing in Dinan for an Englishman to manage; no English agency required. Colonel Manwaring settled down into a kind of somnolent submission to obscure fortunes. He liked the old town, and he liked the climate. He liked the cooking, and he liked being out of the way of all the people he knew, and whose vicinity would have obliged him to live up to a certain conventional level. He liked to get his English newspapers upon French soil, and it irked him not that they were thirty-six hours old. He liked to bask in the sunshine on the terrace above the Rance, or in the open places of the town. He liked talking of the possibilities of an impending war, in very dubious French, with the French officers, whose acquaintance he made at club or café. He had sold his commission

and sunk the proceeds of the sale upon an annuity. He had a little income of his own, and his wife had a little money from a maiden aunt, and these resources just enabled him to live with a certain unpretending comfort. He had a good Breton cook, and an old Scotch valet and butler, who would have gone through fire and water for his master. Mrs. Manwaring was a thoroughly negative character, placid as summer seas, sympathetic and helpless. She let Macgregor and Antoinette manage the house for her, do all the catering, pay all the bills, and work the whole machinery of her domestic life. She rejoiced in having a good-tempered husband and obedient daughters. She had no boys to put her in a fever of anxiety lest they should be making surreptitious ascents in balloons or staking their little all upon Zero at the "Etablissement" at Dinard. In summer she sat all day in one particular south window, knitting stockings for the colonel and reading the English papers. In winter she occupied herself in the same manner by the chimney corner. She devoted one day in the week to writing long letters to distant relatives. Once a day, weather permitting, she took a gentle

constitutional walk upon the terrace above the Rance, with one of her daughters. Needless to say that in this life of harmless apathy she had grown very stout, and that she had forgotten almost every accomplishment of her girlhood.

From the placid monotony of life in Brittany to the placid monotony of life in Cornwall, was not a startling transition; yet when she married Martin Disney, and bade her commonplace father and her apathetic mother good-bye, Isola felt as if she had escaped from stagnation into a fresh and vigorous atmosphere. Disney's character made all the difference. He was every inch a soldier, a keen politician, a man who had seen many countries and read many books, clear-brained, strong-willed, energetic, self-reliant. She felt what it was to belong to somebody who was capable of taking care of her. She trusted him implicitly; and she loved him with as deep a love as a girl of nineteen is capable of feeling for any lover. It may be that the capacity for deep feeling is but half developed at that age, and in that one fact may be found the key to many domestic mysteries; mysteries

of unions which begin in the gladness and warmth of responsive affection, and which, a few years later, pass into a frozen region of indifference or are wrecked on sunken rocks of guilty passion. Certain it was that Isola Manwaring gave her hand to this grave, middle-aged soldier, in all the innocence of a first love; and the love with which he rewarded her confidence, the earnest watchful love of a man of mature years, was enough for her happiness. That honeymoon time, that summer of installation in the Cornish cottage, and then the leisurely journey to Venice in the waning brilliance of a southern October, seemed like one long happy dream, as she looked back upon it now, after a year of solitude.

The doctor had decided that, in the delicate health in which she found herself at the end of that summer, it would be dangerous for her to accompany her husband to India, more especially as a campaign in Burmah meant roughing it, and she would in all probability have been separated from him in the East; so they bade each other a sad good-bye at Venice, and Isola travelled quickly homeward, all possible comfort

having been secured for her on the way, by her husband's forethought. It had been a long, sad, sleepy journey, through a rain-blurred landscape, and she was glad when the evening of the fourth day brought her to the snug little dining-room in the Angler's Nest, where Tabitha was waiting for her with a cheerful fire and the amber-shaded reading lamp, and the most delightful little composite meal of chicken and tongue, and tart, and cream, and tea. It was pleasant to be among familiar things, after that long journey in stuffy ladies' carriages, with elderly invalids, whose chief talk was of their ailments. Pleasant to see the Shah's solemn sea-green eyes staring at her, and to have to repulse the demonstrative attentions of Tim, who leapt upon her lap and licked her face vehemently every time he caught her off her guard.

She was ill and broken down after her journey, and that sad parting, and she hid her tears upon Tabitha's comfortable arm.

"It will be at least a year before he comes back," she sobbed. "How can I live without him all that dreary time?"

Tabitha thought it was very hard upon the

girl-wife, but affected to make light of it. "Lor, bless you, ma'am," she said, "a year looks a long time, but it isn't much when you come to grapple with it. There'll be such a lot for you to do. There'll be the garden. We ought to make ever so many improvements next spring and summer, against the master comes home. And there's your piano. You want to improve yourself—I've heard you say so—and you can get up all sorts of new tunes, and won't the Major be pleased with you—and then—there'll be something else to occupy your mind before next summer comes."

That "something else" which was to have filled Isola's empty life with a new interest, ended in disappointment. She was very ill at the beginning of the new year, and Tabitha nursed her with motherly tenderness long after the doctor and the professional nurse had renounced their care of her. She regained strength very slowly after that serious illness, and it was only in June she was able to take the lonely rambles she loved, or row in her little boat upon the river.

Tabitha was a servant in a thousand, faithful

and devoted, clever, active, and industrious. She had been maid to Martin Disney's mother for nearly fifteen years, had nursed her mistress through a long and weary illness, and had closed her eyes in death. Martin parted with that faithful servant with reluctance after the breaking up of his mother's household, and he told her if he should ever marry and have a house of his own—a very remote contingency—she must be his housekeeper. Love and marriage came upon him before the end of the year, as a delightful surprise. He bought the Angler's Nest, and he engaged Tabitha for the rest of her life, at wages which, beginning at a liberal figure, were to rise a pound every Christmas.

"As if I cared about wages, Mr. Martin," exclaimed Tabitha. "I'd just as soon come to you for nothing. I've got more clothes than will last my time, I'll be bound. You'd only have to find me in shoe-leather."

She had never got out of the way of calling her master by the name by which she had first known him, when his father and elder brother were both at home, in the old family house

at Fowey. In all moments of forgetfulness he was still "Mr. Martin."

And now, in this bright November morning, Tabitha came out to say that breakfast was waiting for her young mistress, and mistress and maid went in together to the cosy dining-room, where the small round table near the window was arranged as only Tabitha could arrange a table—with autumn flowers, and spotless damask, and a new-laid egg, and a dish of honey, and some dainty little rolls of Tabitha's own making, nestling in a napkin, a breakfast for a Princess in a fairy tale.

There was only one other servant in the little household—a bouncing, rosy-cheeked Cornish girl, who was very industrious under Tabitha's eye, and very idle when she was out of that faithful housekeeper's ken. Tabitha cooked and took care of everything, and for the most part waited upon her mistress in this time of widowhood, although Susan was supposed to be parlour-maid.

Tabitha poured out the tea, and buttered a roll, while Isola leaned back in the bamboo chair and played with the Shah.

"I never knew him do such a thing before," said Tabitha, in continuation of a theme which had been fully discussed last night.

"Oh, it was very kind and polite; but it was not such a tremendous thing, after all," answered Isola, still occupied with the Persian. "He could hardly stand by and see one drowned. You have no idea what the rain was like."

"But to send you home in his own carriage."

"There was nothing else for him to do—except send me home in the gardener's cart. He could not have turned out a dog in such weather."

"It's a thing that never happened before, and it just shows what a respect he must have for the Disneys. You don't know how stand-offish he is with all the people about here—how he keeps himself to himself. Not a bit like his father and mother. They used to entertain all the neighbourhood, and they went everywhere, as affable as you like. He has taken care to show people that he doesn't want their company. They say he has led a very queer kind of life at home and abroad; never settling down anywhere, here to-day and gone to-morrow; roving about with his yacht. I don't believe any good ever comes of a

young gentleman like that having a yacht. It would be ever so much better for him to live at the Mount and keep a pack of harriers."

"Why should a yacht be bad?" asked Isola, lazily beginning her breakfast, Tabitha standing by the table all the time, ready for conversation.

"Oh, I don't know. It gives a young man too much liberty," answered Tabitha, shaking her head with a meaning air, as if with a knowledge of dark things in connection with yachts. "He can keep just what company he likes on board—gentlemen or ladies. He can gamble—or drink—as much as he likes. There's nobody to check him. Sundays and weekdays, night and day, are all alike to him."

"Lord Lostwithiel is not particularly young," said Isola, musingly, not paying much attention to this homily on yachts. "He must be thirty, I think."

"Thirty-two last birthday. He ought to marry and settle down. They say he's very clever, and that he's bound to make a figure in politics some of these odd days."

Isola looked at the clock on the chimney-piece—a gilt horse-shoe with onyx nails; one of her

wedding presents. It was early yet—only half-past nine. Lord Lostwithiel had talked about calling to inquire after her health. She felt overpowered with shyness at the thought of seeing him again, alone—with no stately Mrs. Mayne to take the edge off a *tête-à-tête*. Anything to escape such an ordeal! There was her boat—that boat of which she was perfect mistress, and in which she went for long, dawdling expeditions towards Fowey or Lostwithiel with only Tim for her companion—Tim, who was the best of company, in almost perpetual circulation between stem and stern, balancing himself in perilous places every now and then, to bark furiously at imaginary foes in slowly passing fishermen's boats.

"Have you any fancy about lunch, ma'am?" asked Tabitha, lingering with feather-brush in hand over a side-table, on which work-basket, books, writing-case, and flower-vases were arranged with tasteful neatness by those skilful hands.

"No, you dear old Tabbie; you know that anything will do for me. Bread and jam, if you like, and some of your clotted cream. Won't it

be nice when we have our very own dairy, and our very own cows, who will know us and be fond of us, like Tim and the Shah?"

She put on her hat and jacket, and went out into the garden again, singing "La Lettre de Perichole" as she went. It was a capital idea to take refuge in her boat. If his Lordship should call—which was doubtful—since he might be one of that numerous race of people whose days are made up of unfulfilled intentions and promises never realized—if he should call, she would be far away when he came. He would make his inquiry, leave his card, which would look nice in the old Indian bowl on the hall-table. Such cards have a power of flotation unknown to other pasteboard; they are always at the top.

Isola went to the little boat-house on the edge of the lawn, Tim following her. She pushed the light skiff down the slope into the water, and in a few minutes more her sculls were in the row-locks and she was moving slowly up the river, between autumnal woods, in a silence broken only by the dip of the sculls and the little rippling sound as the water dropped away from them. A good deal of her life was spent like

this, moving slowly up the river through that deep silence of the woodland shores. The river was as beautiful as the Dart almost, but lonelier and more silent. It was Martin Disney's river—the river whose ripples had soothed his mother's dying ears—the last of all earthly sounds that had been heard in the stillness of the death-chamber.

In that tranquil atmosphere Isola used to dream of her absent husband and of that mystical world of the East which seemed made up of dreams—the world of Brahma and Buddha, of jewel-bedecked Rajahs and Palace-tombs—world of beauty and of terror; of tropical forests, tigers, orchids, serpents, elephants, Thugs.

She dreamt her dream of that strange world in fear and trembling, conjuring up scenes of horror—tiger hunts; snakes hidden in the corner of a tent; battle; fever; fire; mutiny. Her morbid imagination pictured all possible and impossible danger for the man she loved. And then she thought of his home-coming—his return—for good, for good—for all the span of their joint lives; and she longed for that return with the sickness of hope deferred.

She would go back to the Angler's Rest sometimes after one of these dreamy days upon the river, and would pace about the house or the garden, planning things for her husband's return, as if he were due next day. She would wheel his own particular chair to the drawing-room fireplace, and look at it, and arrange the fall of the curtains before the old-fashioned bow-window, and change the position of the lamp, and alter the books on the shelves, and do this and that with an eye to effect, anxious to discover how the room might be made prettiest, cosiest, most lovable and home-like—for him, for him, for him!

And now she had to resign herself to a year's delay, perhaps. Yes, he had said it might be a year. All that bright picture of union and content, which had seemed so vivid and so near, had now grown dim and pale. It had melted into a shadowy distance. To a girl who has but just passed her twentieth birthday a year of waiting and delay seems an eternity.

"I won't think of him," she said to herself, plunging her sculls fiercely into the rippling water. The tide was running down, and it was

strong enough to have carried her little boat out to sea like an autumn leaf swept along the current. "I must try to lull my mind to sleep, as if I were an enchanted Princess, and so bridge over twelve slow, dull months of loneliness. I won't think of you, Martin, my good, brave, truest of the true! I'll occupy my poor, foolish little mind. I'll write a novel, perhaps, like old Miss Carver at Dinan. Anything in the world—just to keep my thoughts from always brooding on one subject."

She rowed on steadily, hugging the shore under the wooded hillside, where the rich autumn colouring and the clear, cool lights were so full of beauty—a beauty which she could feel, with a vague, dim sense which just touched the realm of poetry. Perhaps she felt the same sense of loss which Keats or Alfred de Musset would have felt in the stillness of such a scene—the want of something to people the wood and the river—some race of beings loftier than fishermen and peasants; some of those mystic forms which the poet sees amidst the shadows of old woods or in the creeks and sheltered inlets of a secluded river.

She thought, with a half-smile, of yesterday's adventure. What importance that foolish Tabitha gave to so simple an incident; the merest commonplace courtesy, necessitated by circumstances; and only because the person who had been commonly courteous was Richard Hulbert, thirteenth Baron Lostwithiel. Thirteenth Baron! There lay the distinction. These Cornish folks worship antique lineage. Tabitha would have thought very little of a mushroom peer's civility, although he had sent her mistress home in a chariot and four. She was no worshipper of wealth, and she turned up her blunt old nose at Mr. Crowther, of Glenaveril—the great new red-brick mansion which had sprung up like a fungus amidst the woods only yesterday—because he had made his money in trade, albeit his trade had been upon a large scale, and altogether genteel and worthy to be esteemed—a great cloth factory at Stroud, which was said to have clad half the army at one period of modern history.

Poor, foolish Tabitha! What would she have thought of the tea-drinking in that lovely old room, mysteriously beautiful in the light of a

wood fire—the playful, uncertain light which glorifies everything? What would she have thought of those walls of books—richly bound books, books in sombre brown, big books and little books, from floor to ceiling? A room which made those poor little oak bookcases in the cottage parlour something to blush for. What would Tabitha have thought of his deferential kindness—that tone of deepest consideration with which such men treat all women, even the old and uncomely? She could hardly have helped admiring his good manners, whatever dark things she might have been told about his earlier years.

Why should he not have a yacht? It seemed the fittest life for a man without home ties; a man still young, and with no need to labour at a profession. What better life could there be than that free wandering from port to port over a romantic sea—and to Isola all seas were alike mysterious and romantic.

She dawdled away the morning; she sculled against the stream for nearly three hours, and then let her boat drift down the river to the garden above the tow-path. It was long past

her usual time for luncheon when she moored her boat to the little wooden steps, leaving it for Thomas, the gardener, to pull up into the boat-house. She had made up her mind that if Lostwithiel troubled himself to make any inquiry about her health he would call in the morning.

She had guessed rightly. Tabitha was full of his visit, and his wondrous condescension. He had called at eleven o'clock, on his way to the railway station at Fowey. He called in the most perfect of T carts, with a bright bay horse. Tabitha had opened the door to him. He had asked quite anxiously about Mrs. Disney's health. He had walked round the garden with Tabitha and admired everything, and had told her that Major Disney had a better gardener than any he had at the Mount, after which he had left her charmed at his amiability. And so this little episode in Isola's life came to a pleasant end, leaving no record but his lordship's card, lying like a jewel on the top of less distinguished names in the old Indian bowl.

CHAPTER III.

"OH MOMENT ONE AND INFINITE!"

Isola fancied that her adventure was all over and done with after that ceremonious call of inquiry; but in so narrow a world as that of Trelasco it was scarcely possible to have seen the last of a man who lived within three miles; and she and Lord Lostwithiel met now and again in the course of her solitary rambles. The walk into Fowey, following the old disused railway, was almost her favourite, and one which she had occasion to take oftener than any other, since Tabitha was a stay-at-home person, and expected her young mistress to do all the marketing, so that Isola had usually some errand to take her into the narrow street on the hillside above the sea. It was at Fowey that she oftenest met

Lostwithiel. His yacht, the *Vendetta*, was in the harbour under repairs, and he went down to look at the work daily, and often dawdled upon the deck till dusk, watching the carpenters, or talking to his captain. They had been half over the world together, master and man, and were almost as familiar as brothers. The crew were half English and half foreign; and it was a curious mixture of languages in which Lostwithiel talked to them. They were most of them old hands on board the *Vendetta*, and would have stood by the owner of the craft if he had wanted to sail her up the Phlegethon.

She was a schooner of eighty tons, built for speed, and with a rakish rig. She had cost, with her fittings, her extra silk sails for racing, more money than Lostwithiel cared to remember; but he loved her as a man loves his mistress, and if she were costly and exacting, she was no worse than other mistresses, and she was true as steel, which they are not always; and so he felt that he had money's worth in her. He showed her to Isola one evening from the promontory above the harbour, where she met him in the autumn sundown. Her work at the butcher's and the

grocer's being done, she had gone up to that airy height by Point Neptune to refresh herself with a long look seaward before she went back to her home in the valley. Lostwithiel took her away from the Point, and made her look down into the harbour.

"Isn't she a beauty?" he asked, pointing below.

Her inexperienced eyes roamed about among the boats, colliers, fishing-boats, half a dozen yachts of different tonnage.

"Which is yours?" she asked.

"Which? Why, there is only one decent boat in the harbour. The schooner."

She saw which boat he meant by the direction in which he flourished his walking-stick, but was not learned in distinctions of rig. The *Vendetta*, being under repair, did not seem to her especially lovely.

"Have you pretty cabins," she asked childishly.

"Oh yes, they're pretty enough; but that's not the question. Look at her lines. She skims over the water like a gull. Ladies seem to think only what a boat looks like inside. I believe my

boat is rather exceptional, from a lady's point of view. Will you come on board and have a look at her?"

"Thanks, no; I couldn't possibly. It will be dark before I get home as it is."

"But it wouldn't take you a quarter of an hour, and we could row you up the river in no time—ever so much faster than you could walk."

Isola looked frightened at the very idea.

"Not for the world!" she said. "Tabitha would think I had gone mad. She would begin to fancy that I could never go out without overstaying the daylight, and troubling you to send me home."

"Ah, but it is so long since you were last belated," he said, in his low caressing voice, with a tone that was new to her and different from all other voices; "ages and ages ago—half a lifetime. There could be no harm in being just a little late this mild evening, and I would row you home—myself, under the new moon. Look at her swinging up in the grey blue there above Polruan. She looks like a fairy boat, anchored in the sky by that star hanging a fathom below her keel. I look at her, and wish—wish—wish!"

He looked up, pale in the twilight, with dark deep-set eyes, of which it was never easy to read the expression. Perhaps that inscrutable look made those sunken and by no means brilliant eyes more interesting than some much handsomer eyes—interesting with the deep interest that belongs to the unknowable.

"Good night," said Isola. "I'm afraid that I shall be very late."

"Good night. You would be earlier if you would trust to the boat."

He held out his hand, and she gave him hers, hesitatingly for the first time in their acquaintance. It was after this parting in the wintry sundown that she first began to look troubled at meeting him.

The troubled feeling grew upon her somehow. In a life so lonely and uneventful trifles assume undue importance. She tried to avoid him, and on her journeys to Fowey she finished her business in the village street and turned homewards without having climbed the promontory by that rugged walk she loved so well. It needed some self-denial to forego that keen pleasure of standing on the windy height and gazing across

the western sea towards Ushant and her native province; but she knew that Lord Lostwithiel spent a good deal of his time lounging on the heights above the harbour, and she did not want to meet him again.

Although she lived her quiet life in the shortening days for nearly a month without meeting him she was not allowed to forget his existence. Wherever she went people talked about him and speculated about him. Every detail of his existence made matter for discussion; his yacht, his political opinions, his talents, his income, his matrimonial prospects, the likelihood or unlikelihood of his settling down permanently at the Mount, and taking the harriers, which were probably to be without a master within a measurable distance of time. There was so little to talk about in Trelasco and those scattered hamlets between Fowey and Lostwithiel.

Isola found herself joining in the talk at afternoon tea-parties, those haphazard droppings in of charitable ladies who had been their rounds among the cottagers and came back to the atmosphere of gentility worn out by long stories

of woes and ailments, sore legs and rheumatic joints, and were very glad to discuss a local nobleman over a cup of delicately flavoured Indian tea in the glow of a flower-scented drawing-room.

Among other houses Mrs. Disney visited Glenaveril, Mr. Crowther's great red-brick mansion, with its pepper-box turrets, and Jacobean windows, after the manner of Burleigh House by Stamford town.

Here lived in wealth and state quite the most important family within a mile of Trelasco, the Vansittart Crowthers, erst of Pilbury Mills, near Stroud, now as much county as a family can make itself after its head has passed his fortieth birthday. Nobody quite knew how Mr. Crowther had come to be a Vansittart—unless by the easy process of baptism and the complaisance of an aristocratic sponsor; but the Crowthers had been known in Stroud for nearly two hundred years, and had kept their sacks upright, as Mr. Crowther called it, all that time.

Fortune had favoured this last of the Crowthers, and, at forty years of age, he had found himself rich enough to dispose of his business to two

younger brothers and a brother-in-law, and to convert himself into a landed proprietor. He bought up all the land that was to be had about Trelasco. Cornish people cling to their land like limpets to a rock; and it was not easy to acquire the ownership of the soil. In the prosperous past, when land was paying nearly four per cent. in other parts of England, Cornishmen were content to hold estates that yielded only two per cent.; but the days of decay had come when Mr. Crowther entered the market, and he was able to buy out more than one gentleman of ancient lineage.

When he had secured his land, he sent to Plymouth for an architect, and he so harried that architect and so tampered with his drawings that the result of much labour and outlay was that monstrosity in red brick with stone dressings, known in the neighbourhood as Glenaveril. Mr. Crowther's eldest daughter was deep in Lord Lytton's newly published poem when the house was being finished, and had imposed that euphonious name upon her father. Glenaveril. The house really was in a glen, or at least in a wooded valley, and Glenaveril seemed to suit

it to perfection; and so the romantic name of a romantic poem was cut in massive Gothic letters on the granite pillars of Vansittart Crowther's gate, beneath a shield which exhibited the coat of arms made and provided by the Herald's College.

Mrs. Vansittart Crowther was at home on Thursday afternoons, when the choicest Indian tea and the thickest cream, coffee as in Paris, and the daintiest cakes and muffins which a professed cook could provide, furnished the zest to conversation; for it could scarcely be said that the conversation gave a zest to those creature comforts. It would be perhaps nearer the mark to say that Mrs. Crowther was supposed to sit in the drawing-room on these occasions while the two Miss Crowthers were at home. The mistress of Glenaveril was not an aspiring woman; and in her heart of hearts she preferred Gloucestershire to Cornwall, and the stuccoed villa on the Cheltenham road, with its acre and a half of tennis-lawn and flower-beds, open to the blazing sun, and powdered with the summer dust, to Glenaveril, with its solemn belt of woodlands, and its too spacious grandeur. She was not

vulgar or illiterate. She never misplaced an aspirate. She had learnt to play the piano and to talk French at the politest of young ladies' schools at Cheltenham. She never dressed outrageously, or behaved rudely. She had neither red hands nor splay feet. She was in all things blameless; and yet Belinda and Alicia, her daughters, were ashamed of her, and did their utmost to keep her, and her tastes, and her opinions in the background. She had no style. She was not "smart." She seemed incapable of grasping the ideas, or understanding the ways of smart people; or at least her daughters thought so.

"Your mother is one of the best women I know," said the curate to Alicia, being on the most confidential terms with both sisters, "and yet you and Miss Crowther are always trying to edit her."

"Father wants a great deal more editing than mother," said Belinda, "but there's no use in talking to him. He is encased in the armour of self-esteem. It made my blood run cold to see him taking Lord Lostwithiel over the grounds and stables the other day—praising everything,

and pointing out this and that,—and even saying how much things had cost!"

"I dare say it was vulgar," agreed the curate, "but it's human nature. I've seen a duke behave in pretty much the same way. Children are always proud of their new toys, and men are but children of a larger growth, don't you know; and you'll find there's a family resemblance in humanity, which is stronger than training."

"Lord Lostwithiel would never behave in that kind of way—boring people about his stables."

"Lord Lostwithiel doesn't care about stables,—he would bore you about his yacht, I dare say."

"No, he never talks of himself or his own affairs. That is just the charm of his manner. He makes us all believe that he is thinking about us; and yet I dare say he forgets us directly he is outside the gate."

"I'm sure he does," replied Mr. Colfox, the curate. "There isn't a more selfish man living than Lostwithiel."

The fair Belinda looked at him angrily. There are assertions which young ladies make on purpose to have them controverted.

Mrs. Disney hated the great red-brick porch, with its vaulted roof and monstrous iron lantern, and the bell which made such a clamour, as if it meant fire, or at least dinner, when she touched the hanging brass handle. She hated to find herself face to face with a tall footman, who hardly condescended to say whether his mistress were at home or not, but just preceded her languidly along the broad corridor, where the carpet was so thick that it felt like turf, and flung open the drawing-room door with an air, and pronounced her name into empty space, so remote were the half-dozen ladies at the other end of the room, clustered round Belinda's tea-table, and fed with cake by Alicia, while Mrs. Crowther sat in the window a little way off, with her basket of woolwork at her side, and her fat somnolent pug lying at her feet. To Isola it was an ordeal to have to walk the length of the drawing-room, navigating her course amidst an archipelago of expensive things—Florentine tables, portfolios of engravings, Louis Seize Jardinières, easels supporting the last expensive etching from Goupil's—to the window where Mrs. Crowther waited to

receive her, rising with her lap full of wools, to shake hands with simple friendliness and without a vestige of style. Belinda shook hands on a level with the tip of her sharp *retroussé* nose, and twirled the silken train of her tea-gown with the serpentine grace of Sarah Bernhardt. She prided herself on those serpentine movements and languid graces which belong to the Græco-Belgravian period; while Alicia held herself like a ramrod, and took her stand upon being nothing if not sporting. Her olive-cloth gown and straight starched collar, her neat double-soled boots and cloth gaiters, were a standing reproach to Belinda's silken slovenliness and embroidered slippers, always dropping off her restless feet, and being chased surreptitiously among her lace and pongee frillings. Poor Mrs. Crowther disliked the Guard's collar, which she felt was writing premature wrinkles upon her younger girl's throat, but she positively loathed the loose elegance of the Indian silk tea-gown, with its wide Oriental sleeves, exhibiting naked arms to the broad daylight. That sloppy raiment made a discord in the subdued harmony of the

visitors' tailor-made gowns—well worn some of them—brown, and grey, and indigo, and russet; and Mrs. Crowther was tortured by the conviction that her elder daughter looked disreputable. This honest matron was fond of Isola Disney. In her own simple phraseology, she had "taken to her;" and pressed the girl-wife to come every Thursday afternoon.

"It must be so lonely for you," she said gently, "with your husband so far away, and you such a child, too. I wonder your mamma doesn't come and stay with you for a bit. You must always come on our Thursdays. Now mind you do, my dear."

"I don't think our Thursdays are remarkably enlivening, mother," said Alicia, objecting to the faintest suggestion of fussiness, the crying sin of both her parents. And then she turned to Isola, and measured her from head to foot. "It's rather a pity you don't hunt," she said. "We had a splendid morning with the harriers."

"Perhaps I may get a little hunting by-and-by, when my husband comes home."

"Ah, but one can't begin all at once; and

this is a difficult country; breakneck hills, and nasty fences. Have you hunted much?"

"Hardly at all. I was out in a boar-hunt once, near Angers, but only as a looker-on. It was a grand sight. The Duke of Beaufort came over to Brittany on purpose to join in it."

"How glorious a boar-hunt must be! I must get my father to take me to Angers next year. Do you know a great many people there?"

"No, only two or three professors at the college, and the Marquis de Querangal, the gentleman who has the boar-hounds. His daughter used to visit at Dinan, and she and I were great friends."

"Lord Lostwithiel talked about boar-hunting the other night," said Alicia. "It must be capital fun." His name recurred in this way, whatever the conversation might be, with more certainty than Zero on the wheel at roulette.

He had been there in the evening, thought Isola. There had been a dinner-party, perhaps, at which he had been present. She had not long to wonder. The name once pronounced, the stream of talk flowed on. Yes, there had been a dinner, and Lord Lostwithiel had been

delightful; so brilliant in conversation as compared with everybody else; so witty, so cynical, so *fin de siècle.*

"I didn't hear him say anything very much out of the common," said Mrs. Crowther, in her matter-of-fact way.

She liked having a nobleman or any other local magnate at her table; but she had too much common sense to be hypnotized by his magnificence, and made to taste milk and water as Maronean wine.

"Do you know Lord Lostwithiel?" Belinda asked languidly, as Isola sipped her tea, sitting shyly in the broad glare of a colossal fireplace. "Oh yes, by-the-by, you met him here the week before last."

Mrs. Disney blushed to the roots of those soft tendril-like curls which clustered about her forehead; but she said never a word. She had no occasion to tell them the history of that meeting in the rain, or of those many subsequent meetings which had drifted her into almost the familiarity of an old friendship. They might take credit to themselves for having made her acquainted with their star if they liked. She

had seen plenty of smart people at Dinan in those sunny summer months when visitors came from Dinard to look at the old quiet inland city. Lostwithiel's rank had no disturbing influence upon her mind. It was himself—something in his look and in his voice, in the mere touch of his hand—an indescribable something which of late had moved her in his presence, and made her faintly tremulous at the very sound of his name.

He was announced while they were talking of him, and he seemed surprised to come suddenly upon that slim unobtrusive figure almost hidden by Belinda's flowing garment and fuller form. Belinda was decidedly handsome—handsomer than an heiress need be; but she was also just a shade larger than an heiress need be at three and twenty. She was a Rubens' beauty, expansive, florid, and fair, with reddish auburn hair piled on the top of her head. Sitting between this massive beauty and the still more massive chimney-piece, Mrs. Disney was completely hidden from the new arrival.

He discovered her suddenly while he was shaking hands with Belinda, and his quick

glance of pleased surprise did not escape that young lady's steely blue eyes. Not a look or a breath ever does escape observation in a village drawing-room. Even the intellectual people, the people who devour all Mudie's most solid books—travels, memoirs, metaphysics, agnostic novels—even these are as keenly interested in their neighbours' thoughts and feelings as the unlettered rustic in the village street.

Lostwithiel took the proffered cup of tea, and planted himself near Mrs. Disney, with his back against the marble caryatid which bore up one-half of the chimney-piece. Alicia began to talk to him about his yacht. How were the repairs going on? and so on, and so on, delighted to air her technical knowledge. He answered her somewhat languidly, as if the *Vendetta* were not first in his thoughts at this particular moment.

"What about this ball?" he asked presently. "You are all going to be there, of course?"

"Do you mean the hunt ball at Lostwithiel?"

"Of course! What other ball could I mean? It is the great festivity of these parts. The one tremendous event of the winter season. It was a grand idea of you new people to revive the old

festivity, which had become a tradition. I wore my first dress coat at the Lostwithiel Hunt Ball nearly twenty years ago. I think it was there I first fell in love, with a young lady in pink tulle, who was miserable because she had been mistaken enough to wear pink at a hunt ball. I condoled with her, assured her that in my eyes she was lovely, although her gown clashed—that was her word, I remember—with the pink coats. My coat was not pink, and I believe she favoured me a little on that account. She gave me a good many waltzes in the course of the evening, and I can answer for her never wearing that pink frock again, for I trampled it to shreds. There were traces of her to be found all over the rooms, as if I had been Greenacre and she my victim's body."

"It will be rather a humdrum ball, I'm afraid," said Belinda. "All the best people seem to be away."

"Never mind that if the worst people can dance. I am on the committee, so I will answer for the supper and the champagne. You like a dry brand, of course, Miss Crowther?"

"I never touch wine of any kind."

"No; then my chief virtue will be thrown away upon you. Are all young ladies blue-ribbonites nowadays, I wonder? Mrs. Disney, pray tell me you are interested in the champagne question."

"I am not going to the ball."

"Not going! Oh, but it is a duty which you owe to the county! Do you think because you are an alien and a foreigner you can flout our local gaieties—fleer at our solemnities? No, it is incumbent upon you to give us your support."

"Yes, my dear, you must go to the ball," put in Mrs. Crowther, in her motherly tone. "You are much too young and pretty to stay at home, like Cinderella, while we are all enjoying ourselves. Of course you must go. Mr. Crowther has put down his name for five and twenty tickets, and I'm sure there'll be one to spare for you, although we shall have a large house-party."

"Indeed, you are too kind, but I couldn't think——" faltered Isola, with a distressed look.

She knew that Lostwithiel was watching her from his vantage ground ever so far above her head. A man of six feet two has considerable advantages at a billiard-table, and in a quiet flirtation carried on in public.

"If it is a chaperon you are thinking about I'll take care of you," urged good Mrs. Crowther.

"No, it isn't on that account. Mrs. Baynham offered to take me in her party. But I really would much rather not be there. It would seem horrid to me to be dancing in a great, dazzling room, among happy people, while Martin is in Burmah, perhaps in peril of his life on that very night. One can never tell. I often shudder at the thought of what may be happening to him while I am sitting quietly by the fire. And what should I feel at a ball?"

"I should hardly have expected you to have such romantic notions about Major Disney," said Belinda, coolly, "considering the difference in your ages."

"Do you suppose I care the less for him because he is twenty years older than I am?"

"Twenty! Is it really as much as that?" ejaculated Mrs. Crowther, unaffectedly shocked.

"He is just as dear to me," pursued Isola, warmly. "I look up to him, and love him with all my heart. There never was a better, truer man. From the time I began to read history I

always admired great soldiers. I don't mean to say that Martin is a hero—only I know he is a thorough soldier—and he seemed to realize all my childish dreams."

She had spoken impetuously, fancying that there was some slight towards her absent husband in Miss Crowther's speech. Her flash of anger made a break in the conversation, and nothing more was said about her going or not going to the Hunt Ball. They talked of that entertainment in the abstract—discussed the floor—the lighting—the band—and the great people who might be induced to appear, if the proper pressure were put upon them.

"There is plenty of time," said Lostwithiel, "between now and the twenty-second of December—nearly three weeks. Time for you and your sister to get new frocks from London or Paris, Miss Crowther. You mean having new frocks, I suppose?"

"One generally does have a new frock for a dance," replied Belinda, "though the fashions this winter are so completely odious that I would much rather appear in a gown of my great-grandmother's."

Lostwithiel smiled his slow secret smile high up in the fainter firelight. He was reflecting upon his notion of Miss Crowther's great-grandmother, in linsey-wolsey, with a lavender print apron, a costume that would be hardly impressive at a Hunt Ball. He did not give the young lady credit for a great-grandmother from the Society point of view. There was the mother yonder—inoffensive respectability—the grandmother would be humbler—and the great-grandmother he imagined at the wash-tub, or cooking the noontide meal for an artisan husband. He had never yet realized the idea of numerous generations of middle-class life upon the same plane, the same dead level of prosperous commerce.

Isola rose to take leave, after having let her tea get cold, and dropped half her cake on the Persian rug. She felt shyer in that house than in any other. She had a feeling that there she was weighed in the balance and found wanting; that unfriendly eyes were scrutinizing her gloves and hat, and appraising her features and complexion. She felt herself insignificant, colourless, insipid beside that brilliant Miss Crowther,

with her vivid beauty, and her self-assured airs and graces.

Tabitha urged her to be of good heart when she hinted at these feelings.

"Why, Lord have mercy upon us, ma'am, however grand they may all look, it's nothing but wool—only wool; and I heard there used to be a good deal of devil's dust mixed with it, after this Mr. Crowther came into the business."

The dusk was thickening as she went along the short avenue which led to the gates. Mr. Crowther, having built his house in a wood, had been able to cut himself out a carriage drive, which gave him an avenue of more than two centuries' growth, and thus imparted an air of spurious antiquity to his demesne. He felt, as he looked at the massive boles of those old Spanish chestnuts, as if he had belonged to the soil since the Commonwealth.

Even the lodge was an important building, Tudor on one side, and monastic on the other; with that agreeable hodge-podge of styles which the modern architect loveth. It was a better house than the curate lived in, as he often told Miss Crowther.

Isola quickened her pace outside that solemn gateway, and seemed to breathe more freely. She hurried even faster at the sound of a footstep behind her, though there was no need for nervous apprehensions at that early hour in the November evening on the high road between Fowey and Trelasco. Did she know that firm, quick foot-fall; or was it an instinctive avoidance of an unknown danger which made her hurry on till her heart began to beat stormily, and her breath came in short gasps?

"My dear Mrs. Disney, do you usually walk as if for a wager?" asked a voice behind her. "I can generally get over the ground pretty fast, but it was as much as I could do to overtake you without running."

He was not breathless, however. His tones were firm and tranquil. It was she who could scarcely speak.

"I'm afraid I am very late," she answered nervously.

"For what? For afternoon tea by your own fireside? Have you anybody waiting for you at the Angler's Nest, that you should be in such a hurry to get home?"

"No, there is no one waiting, except Tabitha. I expect no one."

"Then why walk yourself into a fever?"

"Tabitha gets fidgety if I am out after dusk."

"Then let Tabitha fidget! It will be good for her liver. Those adipose people require small worries now and again to keep them in health. You mustn't over-pace yourself to oblige Tabitha."

She had slackened her steps, and he was walking by her side, looking down at her from that superb altitude which gave him an unfair advantage. How could she, upon her lower level, escape those searching glances?

She knew that her way home was his way home, so far as the bend of the road which led away from the river; and to avoid him for the intervening distance would have been difficult. She must submit to his company on the road, or make a greater effort than it was in her nature to make.

"You mean to go to this ball, don't you?" he asked earnestly.

"I think not."

"Oh, but pray do! Why should you shut

yourself from all the pleasures of this world, and live like a nun, always? You might surely make just one exception for such a grand event as the Hunt Ball. You have no idea how much we all think of it hereabouts. Remember, it will be the first public dance we have had at Lostwithiel for ever so many years. You will see family diamonds enough to make you fancy you are at St. James's. Do you think Major Disney would dislike your having just one evening's dissipation?"

"Oh no, he would not mind! He is only too kind and indulgent. He would have liked me to spend the winter with my sister in Hans Place, where there would have been gaieties of all kinds; but I don't want to go into society while Martin is away. It would not make me happy."

"But if it made some one else happy—if it made other people happy to see you there?"

"Oh, but it would not matter to anybody! I am a stranger in the land. People are only kind to me for my husband's sake."

"Your modesty becomes you as the dew becomes a rose. I won't gainsay you—only be

sure you will be missed if you don't go to the ball. And if you do go—well, it will be an opportunity of making nice friends. It will be your *début* in county society."

"Without my husband? Please don't say any more about it, Lord Lostwithiel. I had much rather stay at home."

He changed the conversation instantly, asking her what she thought of Glenaveril.

"I think the situation most lovely."

"Yes, there we are all agreed. Mr. Crowther had the good taste to find a charming site, and the bad taste to erect an architectural monstrosity, a chimera in red brick. There was a grange once in the heart of that wood, and the Crowthers have the advantage of acorns and chestnuts that sowed themselves while the sleepy old monks were telling their beads. How do you like Miss Crowther?"

"I hardly know her well enough to like or dislike her. She is very handsome."

"So was Rubens' wife, Helena Forman; but what would one do in a world peopled with Helena Formans? There are galleries in Antwerp which no man should enter without

smoke-coloured spectacles, if he would avoid being blinded by a blaze of red-haired beauty. I am told that the Miss Crowthers will have, at least, a million of money between them in days to come, and that they are destined to make great matches. Perhaps we shall see some of their *soupirants* at the ball. Since the decay of the landed interest, the *chasse aux dots* has become fiercer than of old."

This seemed to come strangely from him who had already been talked of as a possible candidate for one of the Miss Crowthers. It would be such a particularly suitable match, Mrs. Baynham, the doctor's wife, had told Isola. What could his lordship look for beyond a fine fortune and a handsome wife?

"They would make such a splendid pair," said Mrs. Baynham, talking of them as if they were carriage-horses.

Mrs. Disney and her companion crossed a narrow meadow, from the high road to the river-path which was the nearest way to the Angler's Nest. The river went rippling by under the gathering grey of the November evening. On their right hand there was the gloom of dark

woods: and from the meadow on their left rose a thick white mist, like a sea that threatened to swallow them up in its phantasmal tide. The sound of distant oars, dipping with rhythmical measure, was the only sound except their own voices.

Did that three-quarters of a mile seem longer or shorter than usual? Isola hardly knew; but when she saw the lights shining in Tabitha's kitchen, and the fire-glow in the drawing-room, she was glad with the gladness of one who escapes from some fancied danger of ghosts or goblins.

Lostwithiel detained her at the gate.

"Good night," he said; "good night. You will change your mind, won't you, Mrs. Disney? It is not in one so gentle as you to be inflexible about such a trifle. Say that you will honour our ball."

She drew herself up a little, as if in protest against his pertinacity.

"I really cannot understand why you should care whether I go or stay away," she said coldly.

"Oh, but I do care! It is childish, perhaps, on

my part, but I do care; I care tremendously; more than I have cared about anything for a long time. It is so small a thing on your part —it means so much for me! Say you will be there."

"Is that you, ma'am?" asked Tabitha's pleasant voice, while Tabitha's substantial soles made themselves audible upon the gravel path. "I was beginning to get fidgety about you."

"Good night," said Isola, shortly, as she passed through the gate.

It shut with a sharp little click of the latch, and she vanished among the laurels and arbutus. He heard her voice and Tabitha's as they walked towards the house in friendly conversation, mistress and maid.

There was a great over-blown Dijon rose nodding its heavy head over the fence. Roses linger so late in that soft western air. Lostwithiel plucked the flower, and pulled off its petals one by one as he walked towards the village street.

"Will she go—will she stay—go—stay—go —stay?" he muttered, as the petals fluttered to the ground.

"Go! Yes, of course she will go," he said to himself as the last leaf fell. "Does it need ghost from the grave or rose from the garden to tell me that?"

CHAPTER IV.

"DREAMING, SHE KNEW IT WAS A DREAM."

Isola and Lostwithiel met a good many times after that walk through the autumn mists. She tried her utmost to avoid him. She went for fewer walks than of old; nay, she chiefly confined her perambulations to those domestic errands which Tabitha imposed upon her, and such afternoon visits as she felt it incumbent upon her to pay, in strict return for visits paid to her. Major Disney had begged her to be exact in such small ceremonies, and to keep upon the best possible terms with his friends. "I love every soul in the place, for old sake's sake," he told her; and for old sake's sake Isola had to cultivate the people her husband had known all his life.

She tried to avoid Lostwithiel, but Fate was against her, and they met. He was unvaryingly

courteous. He said no word which could offend the most sensitive of women. Prudery itself could have had no ground for alarm. He did not again allude to the ball, or his wishes upon that point. He talked of those common topics of interest to which every day and every season give rise, even in a Cornish village; and yet in this common talk acquaintance ripened until it became friendship unawares. And then—as all sense of shyness and reserve upon Isola's part gave way to a vague, reposeful feeling, like drifting down a sunlit river, with never a breath of chilling wind—they began to exchange confidences about their past lives. Unawares Martin Disney's wife found herself entering into the minutest details about the people she had met on that level road of a monotonous girlhood by which she had come to be what she was. Unawares she betrayed all her feelings and opinions, her likes and dislikes, and even the little weaknesses and eccentricities of her parents —her sister—her wealthy brother-in-law. Never before had she found so good a listener. Her husband had been all affectionate interest in the things that concerned her; yet she had often

discovered that his mind was wandering in the midst of some girlish reminiscence; and he had a tiresome trick of forgetting all those particulars about her friends which would have enabled him to distinguish the personages of a story. He had to be told everything afresh at each recurrence of those names that were so familiar to her. Nor had he Lostwithiel's keen sense of humour, and quick perception of the ridiculous side of life, whereby many a small social sketch fell flat.

The glimpses she caught of her new friend's past existence enthralled her. It was to see new vistas opening into unknown worlds; the world of university life; the world of society, English and continental, with all its varieties of jargon; the world of politics, and literature, and art. It charmed him to see her interest in all those unknown things and people.

"You would very soon be tired of it, and would come back to Trelasco—like the hare to her form—or like me," he said, smiling at her ardent look. "Believe me, it is all dust and ashes. My happiest hours have been on board a yacht, with only half a dozen good books, and

ten or a dozen ignoramuses in blue serge for my companions."

She was to go to the Hunt Ball after all; not because he wished it, but because other people had taken her affairs in hand, and decided that she should go. Dr. and Mrs. Baynham had decided for her. Mrs. Vansittart Crowther had decided for her, and had sent her a ticket with her love by that very footman whose appearance when he opened the door always crushed her, and who had given her a frightful shock when she danced into the kitchen to speak to Tabitha, and found him meekly sitting on a Windsor chair, with his knees drawn up nearly to his chin. Lastly, Tabitha had decided; and Tabitha's opinion went for more than that of anybody else.

"You want a little bit of change and gaiety," said the faithful stewardess. "You have been looking pale and worried ever since you had that bad news from Broomer," this was Tabitha's nearest approach to Burmah, "and you'll be all the better for an evening's pleasure. It isn't as if you had to buy a dress, or even a pair of gloves. You've only worn your wedding-dress

at three parties since you came home from your honeymoon, and it's as fresh as if you'd been married yesterday. You've got everything, and everything of the best. Why shouldn't you go?"

Isola could advance no reason, except her vague fear that her husband might not approve of her appearing at a public ball without him; but at this objection honest Tabitha snapped her fingers.

"I'll answer for Mr. Martin," she said. "He'll be pleased for you to enjoy yourself. 'Don't let her mope while I'm away, Tabby,' he said to me the day before you started for foreign parts. He'd like you to be at the ball. You'll have Mrs. Baynham to take care of you, and what can you want more than that, I should like to know?"

Mrs. Baynham, the portly doctor's wife, was, in Tabitha's mind, the representative of all the respectabilities. How could a girl just out of her teens—a girl who loved dancing, and had been told she danced exquisitely—turn a deaf ear to such arguments, put forward by the person to whose care her husband had in some wise

confided her. If Tabitha approved, Isola thought she could not do wrong in yielding; so the simply-fashioned white satin gown — made in Paris, and with all Parisian *chic*—was taken out of the pot-pourri perfumed drawer. Gloves and fan, and little white slippers were passed in review. There was nothing wanted. The carefullest housewife need not have hesitated on the score of economy.

So the question was finally settled—she was to go to the Hunt Ball. A fly was engaged for her especial service, so that she might not crowd Mrs. Baynham, who was to take two fresh, fat-cheeked nieces, who looked as if they had been fed from infancy upwards upon apple pasties and clotted cream. She was to drive to Lostwithiel in the fly from the Maypole Inn, and she was to join Mrs. Baynham in the cloak-room, and make her entrance under that lady's wing.

This final decision was arrived at about ten days before the event, and for nine of those intervening days Isola's life went by as if she were always sitting in that imaginary boat drifting down a sunlit river; but on the day

of the dance, after just half an hour's quiet walk with Lostwithiel on the towpath, she went back to the cottage pale as ashes; and sat down at her little davenport in the drawing-room, trembling, breathless, and on the verge of hysteria.

She opened the drawers of the davenport one after another, looking for something—helplessly, confusedly, as one whose brain is half distraught. It was ten minutes before she found what she wanted—a sheaf of telegraph forms.

"To Major Disney, Cornwall Fusiliers, Rangoon.—Let me go to you at once. I am miserable. My heart will break if you leave me here."

This was the gist of a message which she wrote half a dozen times, in different words, upon half a dozen forms. Then she tore up all but the last, left that one in her blotting-book, and began to pace the room feverishly, with her hands clasped before her face.

What fever-fraught vision was it that those hands tried to shut out from her burning eyes? So little had happened—so little—only half an hour's quiet walk along the towpath, where the

leafless willows had a grim, uncanny look, like those trees whose old grey branches seemed the arms of the Erlking's daughters, beckoning the child as he nestled in his father's arms, riding through the night. So little—so little —and yet it meant the lifting of a veil—the passage from happy ignorant innocence to the full consciousness of an unholy love. It meant what one kiss on trembling lips meant for Paolo and Francesca. It meant the plunge into a gulf of dark despair—unless she had strength to draw back, seeing the abyss at her feet, warned of her danger.

What had he said? Only a few agitated words—only a revelation. He loved her, loved her with all the passion of his passionate soul; loved her as he had never loved before. They all tell the same story, these destroyers of innocence; and, for that one burning moment, they all mean what they say. Every seducer has his hour of sublime truthfulness; of generous feeling; of ardent heroic aspirations; the hour in which he would perish for the woman he loves; cut off his right hand; burn out his eyes; leap off a monument; do anything except

surrender her, except forego his privilege to destroy her.

It was not too late. The warning had come in time—just in time to save her. She knew now to what ocean that drifting boat was carrying her—through the sunny atmosphere, between the flowery shores of dreamland. It was taking her to the arctic ocean of shame and ruin—the great sea strewn with the corpses of women who had sinned, and suffered, and repented, and died—unforgiven of mankind—to wait the tribunal of God.

"Oh, lor!" cried Tabitha, bursting into the room. "I thought you were never coming home. You ought to go and lay down for two or three hours after your tea, or we shall have you fainting away before the night's over. You've not been eating enough for a healthy canary bird for the last week."

"I'm not very well, Tabbie. I don't think I'll go to the ball."

"Not go! and when the fly's ordered—and will have to be paid for whether or no; for Masters told me he could have let it twelve

deep. Not go! and disappoint Mrs. Baynham, who has set her heart on taking you; and Mrs. Crowther, who gave you the ticket! Why, it would never do! You'll feel well enough when you're there. You won't know whether you're standing on your head or your heels. It's past five o'clock, and your tea has been ready in the study since a quarter to."

"How do you send telegrams to India, Tabitha?"

"Lor, ma'am, how should I know? From the post-office, I suppose, pretty much like other telegrams. But they cost no end of money, I'll be bound. You're not wanting to send a telegram to the major, are you, ma'am, to ask his leave about the ball?"

"No; I was only wondering," Isola answered feebly.

She shut and locked the davenport, leaving her message in the blotting-book. She meant to send it—if not to-day, to-morrow; if not before the ball, after the ball. She felt that her only hope of peace and safety and a clear conscience was at her husband's side. She must go out to him yonder in the unknown

land. She must get to him somehow, with or without his leave—with or without his help. She would brave anything, hazard anything to be with that faithful friend and defender—her first love—her brave, self-denying, God-fearing lover. She felt as if there were no other safety or shelter for her in all the world.

"God will not help me unless I help myself," she muttered distractedly, as she sat in her low chair by the fire, with her head flung back upon the cushions and the untouched meal at her side. Tabitha had left off providing dinner for her, at her particular request. She had neither heart to sit down alone to a formal dinner nor appetite to eat it; so Tabitha had exercised all her skill as a cook, which was great, in preparing a dainty little supper at nine o'clock; and it had irked her that her mistress did such scant justice to the tempting meal.

Isola fell asleep by the fire, comforted by the warmth, worn out by nights that had been made sleepless by vague agitation—by the living over again of accidental meetings, and friendly conversations—not by fear or remorse

—for it was only this day that the danger of that growing friendship had been revealed to her. It was only to-day that she knew what such friendships mean. She slept a feverish sleep, from sheer exhaustion, and dreamt fever-dreams.

Those willows on the bank had recalled Goethe's "Erl Konig"—the ballad she had learnt by rote in her earliest German studies—and the willows and the ballad were interwoven with her dreams. It was Martin Disney who was riding his charger along a dark road, and she was sitting in front of his saddle, clinging to him, hiding her face upon his breast, and the willows were beckoning—she knew those gaunt arms were beckoning to her, although her eyes were hidden—and *he* was following. He was thundering behind them, on a black horse. Yes, and then the dream changed—the dreamer's wandering thoughts directed by another reminiscence of those girlish studies in German poetry. She was Lenore, and she was in the arms of her dead lover. She felt that bony arm—Death's arm—clutching her round the waist. Her streaming hair mingled with the streaming mane of that unearthly horse. She was with Lostwithiel—in

his arms—and they were both dead and both happy—happy in being together. What did they want more than that?

> "Vollbracht, vollbracht ist unser Lauf!
> Das Hochzeitbette, thut sich auf!
> ie Todten reiten schnelle!
> Wir sind, wir sind, zur Stelle."

She woke with the chill of the charnel-house freezing her blood. The fire had gone out. Tim had curled himself at her feet in the folds of her gown. The Persian was staring discontentedly at the ashes in the grate, and Tabitha's sturdy footsteps might be heard in the room above, bustling to and fro, and anon poking the fire, and putting on coals, making all snug and ready for her mistress's toilet.

Isola rang, and Susan, the parlourmaid, brought in the lamp.

"I came twice before, ma'am; but you were fast asleep, so I took the lamp back to the pantry."

Isola looked at the clock. Ten minutes to nine, and she was to meet Mrs. Baynham in the cloak-room at half-past ten. Ten o'clock was the hour on the card, and the fat-faced nieces

were feverishly afraid that all the eligible partners would be snapped up by those wise virgins who appeared earliest on the scene.

"You won't keep us waiting in the cloak-room, will you, dear Mrs. Disney?" they pleaded coaxingly.

Was she to put on her finery and go! There would be time yet to send a note to Mrs. Baynham, excusing herself on the score of illness. The doctor's party would not start before half-past nine. What was she to do? Oh, she wanted to see him once more—just once more—in the brightly-lighted rooms, amidst a crowd—in a place where he would have no chance of repeating those wicked, wicked words—of forgetting all that was due to his own honour and to hers. In the crowded ball-room there would be safety—safety even from evil thoughts. Who could think of anything with dance music sounding in their ears, amidst the dazzle of lamps and the flashing of jewels?

She wanted to go to the ball, to wear her satin gown, to steep herself in light and music; and thus to escape from the dim horrors of that awful dream.

Tabitha seemed like a good angel, when she came in at this juncture with a fresh cup of tea and a plate of dainty little chicken sandwiches.

"Come now, ma'am, I shan't let you go to the ball if you don't take these. What, not a bit of fire—and you asleep here in the cold? What was that addle-pated Susan thinking about, I wonder? I'll take the tray upstairs. There's a lovely fire in your room, and everything ready for you to dress. I want to be able to tell Mr. Martin that his young wife was the belle of the ball."

Isola allowed herself to be led upstairs to the bright, cheerful bedroom, with its pretty chintz-pattern paper, and photographs, and artistic muslin curtains, and glowing fire, and toilet-table, with its glitter of crystal and silver in the pleasant candlelight. She suffered herself to be fed and dressed by Tabitha's skilful hands, almost as if she had been a child; and she came out of her dismal dream into the glad waking world, a radiant figure, with violet eyes and alabaster complexion, lighted up by the loveliest hectic. The simply-made, close-fitting bodice, with folded crape veiling the delicate

bust, and the pure pearly tint of the satin, set off her fragile beauty, while the long train and massive folds of the rich fabric gave statuesque grace to her tall, slim figure; but the crowning glory of her toilette was the garland of white chrysanthemums, for which Tabitha had ransacked all the neighbouring greenhouses; a garland of fluffy, feathery petals, which reached in a diagonal line from her shoulder to the hem of her gown. It was her only ornament, for by some strange caprice she refused to wear the modest pearl necklace and diamond cross which had been her husband's wedding gift.

"Not to-night, Tabbie," she said; and Tabitha saw in this refusal only the coquetry of a lovely woman, who wanted to show the great ladies and squire's wives how poor and common diamonds are by the side of youth and beauty.

"Well, you don't want any jewels, certainly," said Tabitha. "You look as if you were going to be married—all but the veil. Those chrysanthemums are ever so much prettier than orange blossoms. There's the fly. Let me put on your cloak. It's a beautiful night, and almost as mild as May. Everybody will be at the ball. There's

nothing to keep folks away. Well, I do wish the major was here to go with you. Wouldn't he be proud?"

The stars were shining when Isola went along the gravel path to the gate where Masters' fly was waiting, with blazing lamps, which seemed to put those luminous worlds yonder to shame. There was no carriage-drive to the hall door of the Angler's Nest. The house retained all its ancient simplicity, and ignored the necessities of carriage people. Tabitha wrapped her mistress's fur-lined cloak close round her, before she stepped into the fly, which was provided with those elaborate steps that seem peculiar to the hired brougham.

"Good night, Tabitha, and thank you for all the pains you've taken in dressing me—and for the lovely wreath. I shall come home early. I shan't wait for Mrs. Baynham's party."

"Don't you hurry," said Tabitha, heartily. "The Hunt Ball only comes once a year, and you'd better make the most of it. I shan't mind sitting up; and perhaps I shan't be half so dull as you think for."

The flyman shut the door, which nobody but

himself could shut—another peculiarity of hired broughams. The fly vanished in the darkness, and Tabitha ran back to the house, where she found Susan waiting at the hall door in her jacket and hat, as near a reproduction of Mrs. Disney's jacket and hat as local circumstances —or the difference between Bond Street and Lostwithiel—would allow.

"Have you locked and bolted the back doors?" asked Tabitha; "but, lor, I'll go and look myself; I won't trust to your giddy young brains. Mr. Tinkerly will be here with the cart directly. I've only got to put on my bonnet and dolman, after I've taken a look round, and put away Mrs. Disney's jewel-box."

Tabitha was no light-minded housekeeper, but she had her hours of frivolity, and she loved pleasure with the innocent freshness of a most transparent soul. Tinkerly, the butcher, had offered to drive the two ladies—Tabitha and Susan—into Lostwithiel in his tax cart, and, furthermore, to place them where they would see something of the ball, or at least of the company arriving and departing, and beyond all this to give them a snack of supper, "Just

something to bite at and a glass of beer," he told Tabitha deprecatingly, lest he should raise hopes beyond his power of realization.

He meant to do the thing as handsomely as circumstances would permit, certainly to the extent of cold boiled beef and pickles, with Guinness or Bass. He was a family man, of irreproachable respectability, and his meat was supposed to be unmatchable for thirty miles round. He grew it himself, upon those picturesque pastures which sloped skyward, dipping towards the blue of the river, rising towards the blue of the sky.

No precaution of lock, bolt, or bar did Tabitha neglect before she put on her best bonnet, and dignified black cloth dolman, heavy with imitation Astrachan. She and Susan were standing at the gate when Tinkerly drove up with his skittish mare and spring cart, a cart so springy that it threatened to heel over altogether when Tabitha clambered into the place of honour. Mr. Tinkerly's foreman was sitting behind to take care of Susan, and the foreman was unmarried, and of a greasy black-haired comeliness, and there was none happier than Susan

under those wintry stars—not even the great ladies in their family diamonds.

"What are diamonds," said Susan, philosophically, with the foreman's arm sustaining her at a sharp turn in the road, "if you don't care for each other?"

CHAPTER V.

"AND THE CHILD-CHEEK BLUSHING SCARLET
FOR THE VERY SHAME OF BLISS."

PEOPLE who were familiar with the Talbot Hotel, Lostwithiel, in its everyday aspect would hardly have recognized the old-fashioned hostelry to-night, under the transforming hand of the Hunt Club, with Lord Lostwithiel and Vansittart Crowther on the committee. The entrance hall, usually remarkable only for various cases of stuffed birds, and a monster salmon—caught in the Lerrin river in some remote period of history—was now a bower of crimson cloth and white azalias. In the ball-room and ante-room, tea-room and supper-room, were more flowers, and more crimson cloth, while on every side brushes and vizards against the crimson and white panelling testified to the occasion. The dancing-room was very full when Mrs. Baynham's party

made their entrance, the matron in her historical black velvet—which had formed part of her trousseau thirteen years before, when she left the family residence in the chief street of Truro, and all those privileges which appertained to her as the only daughter of a provincial banker, to grace Dr. Baynham's lowlier dwelling. The black velvet gown had been "let out" from time to time, as youth expanded into maturity: and there had been a new bodice and a real Maltese lace flounce within the last three years, which constituted a second incarnation; and Mrs. Baynham walked into the Talbot ball-room with the serene demeanour that goes with a contented mind. She was satisfied with herself, and she was proud of her party, the two fresh, rosy-cheeked girls in sky-blue tulle, Isola, looking like a Mary lily in her white satin raiment, and the village surgeon, who always looked his best in his dress clothes, newly-shaven, and, as it were, pulled together in honour of the occasion.

The room was full, and very full; but Lostwithiel was not there. Isola had an instinctive consciousness that he was missing in that brilliant crowd. People came buzzing round her,

and she was made room for upon a raised bench opposite the gallery where a military band was playing a polka in which the brasses predominated to an ear-splitting extent.

The Glenaveril party made their entrance ten minutes later. The Crowther girls were not afraid of wanting partners. Most young men are glad to dance with half a million of money. There is always an off chance of a good thing, just as there is a chance of breaking the bank at Monte Carlo. Belinda looked superb in a cloud of tulle, like a goddess. Alicia looked too well on horseback to look well off. Her spare straight figure and sharp elbows were not at their best in evening dress. She wore black, and an infinity of bugles, and flashed and glittered more than any one else in the room, though she wore never a jewel.

"Worth, my dear," said Mrs. Baynham to a blue niece, in a mysterious whisper; "I know his style."

There was a buzz of conversation on that raised divan where the matrons were sitting with those newly arrived maidens who were like ships waiting to slide out of their cradles and float

away to sea. Isola and the sky-blue nieces had not long to wait; especially Isola. Men were entreating the stewards to introduce them to that lovely fragile-looking creature in white satin—the best men, the most distinctly county, or those wandering stars from distant counties, or the London galaxy, "men with handles to their names," as Mr. Baynham told Mrs. Crowther, resplendent in salmon brocade, and Venetian point.

"My presentation gown," she informed the doctor's wife; "the Court mantle is ruby velvet, lined with salmon satin. The weigh of it almost pulled me backwards when I curtsied to the royalties—such a lot of them, and I'm afraid I curtsied rather too low to one of the Princesses, for I caught her taking me off when she returned my curtsey."

Isola danced through the lancers as one in a dream. When the heart of a man is oppressed with care, "Ta-rarra, ta-rarra, ta-rà, ta-rà!" What foolishness it all seemed. And her husband in Burmah, hemmed round by murderous dacoits!

She went back to her seat among the matrons,

after almost curtly refusing either refreshment or a promenade through the rooms. Mrs. Crowther was saying solemnly, "I do believe Lord Lostwithiel is not coming after all, and yet he worked so hard on the committee, my husband said, and took such pains about the flowers, and what not."

The tall, slim figure cut its way through the crowd two or three minutes later, and Lostwithiel was standing in front of Isola, and the two matrons.

He wore a pink coat, as became a member of the Lostwithiel Hunt, and the vivid colour accentuated the pallor of his long thin face. He talked to all the ladies on the divan; to the sky-blue nieces even, hoping that their cards were full.

"If not, I must bring you some men I know," he said. "You mustn't miss a dance."

They blushed and trembled with delight, never before having been thus familiarly addressed by a peer of the realm. He asked Isola for her programme, with well-simulated indifference, yet with that air of profound respect with which he talked to all women.

"I hope you can spare me some waltzes," he said.

"She is only just come," said Mrs. Baynham.

"And yet her card is almost full. People have been very officious. Here is a poor little waltz —number seven. May I have that, and number eleven, and number—— "

"Please don't put down your name for anything later than number eleven. I shall be gone long before those late dances."

"Oh, surely, you don't mean to desert us early. Remember this is the one festive occasion of our lives as a sporting community. All our other meetings are given up to carking care, financial difficulties, and squabbling. I shall put down my name in these tempting blanks, and if you disappoint me—well—it will only be like my previous experiences as a fox-hunter."

He gave her back her programme, with all the blanks filled in, and at the bottom a word written, and triply underscored,

'ΑΝΑΓΚΗ.

They had talked of Victor Hugo's romantic story—that romance which the great man so

despised in after years that he was almost offended if any one presumed to praise it in his hearing, although in the half-century that has gone since Victor Hugo was a young man this story of Notre Dame has been unsurpassed as an example of the romantic novel. Lostwithiel had praised the book, and had talked of the monk Frollo, and his fatal love—and that word Fatality, graven upon the wall of his cell, and burnt into his soul.

Isola knew what those Greek letters meant. She dropped the little white and gold programme as if it had been an adder. He went away to a duty dance with a great lady of the district—a lady whose diamonds made a light about her wherever she moved; and then he waltzed with Belinda Crowther, to the admiration of the young lady's mother, and of two or three other matrons on the divan by the door. Were they not a splendid couple, she so brilliantly fair, he dark and pale, bronzed slightly with exposure to the sun in warmer climates than this—not positively handsome, but with such an interesting countenance. So, and so, and so prosed the matrons, until various middle-aged cavaliers came to

invite them to the tea-room, where there was the usual drawback in the shape of a frightful draught from open windows, which the dancers, coming in flushed and heated, voted delicious.

"This will be a good night's work for me," said Dr. Baynham, cheerfully, although he considered it his duty to warn his patients of their danger.

Conscience thus satisfied, he could look on complacently as they eat ices, and selected cool corners of the refreshment-room to flirt in.

"Next to a juvenile party, I don't know anything better—from a professional point of view—than a public ball," he said. "Your canvas corridors, decorated with flowers and bunting, are a fortune to a family practitioner."

Isola danced every dance. She hardly knew who her partners were. She had only a sense of floating in a vortex of light and colour, to some swinging melody. Everything was dream-like—but not horrible, as in her dream by the fireside at home. This was a happy dream, as of a creature with wings, who knew not of care in the present or a soul to be saved in the future. And then came her waltz with Lostwithiel, and

that strong arm was round her, bearing her up as a flower is borne upon a rushing tide, so that she had no consciousness of movement on her own part, only of floating, floating, floating, to that languid three-time melody.

It was the last popular waltz they were playing—a waltz that had been last summer's delight in the arid gardens of South Kensington—"Il n'y a que toi;" a waltz with a chorus which the band trolled out merrily, at intervals, in the French of Stratford atte Bow.

"Il n'y a que toi," whispered Lostwithiel, with his lips close to the soft brown hair above the white forehead. "Not a bad name for a waltz when one is waltzing with just one person in the world."

Out in the cool night there was a little knot of people as merry after their homelier fashion as town and county in the ball-room. One of the windows had been opened at the top for ventilation, and this opening had been turned to advantage. A large, substantial kitchen table had been placed in front of the window, and upon this improvised platform stood Tabitha, Susan, the head chamber-maid, and the ostler's wife—

this last on suffrance, and evidently not in society—looking on at the ball. The window was under a broad, wooden verandah, that sloped above these spectators' heads. They were thus in dense shadow, and unseen by the occupants of the lamplit room.

Susan was exuberant in her delight.

"I was never at a ball before," she said. "Oh, ain't it lovely? Don't I wish I could dance like that? Lor, do look at that fat old party, spinning round like a teetotum! Well, I never did! Don't she prespire!" exclaimed Susan, indulging in a running commentary which left much to be desired in the matter of refinement.

This unsophisticated damsel heartily admired youth and beauty, and the smart frocks and flashing gems; but she was cruelly hard upon those dancers whose charms were on the wane, or whose frocks were inferior or ugly.

"Well, I wouldn't," said Susan, "I wouldn't go to a ball like this if I couldn't have everything nice. Look at that tall girl in yeller. Did you ever see such a scarecrow? I'd ever so much rather stay at home, or stand outside, like this. I should feel it better became me."

Tabitha made no such remarks. She was singularly silent and thoughtful, as she stood looking down at the crowded room from her point of vantage on the kitchen table. She had only eyes for one figure—the willowy form in the glistening white satin gown, with the feathery Japanese chrysanthemums, a little crushed and faded by this time; or perhaps it may be said for two figures, since one followed the other as the shadow follows the substance. She saw them waltzing together, when supper was in full progress, and the room comparatively clear. She saw the graceful head inclining towards his shoulder, the slender waist held in his firm embrace; and it seemed to her that the waltz was an invention of the Arch Enemy. She thought of it very much as people thought seventy years ago when Byron wrote his poetical denunciation of the new dance. She saw those two moving slowly towards an adjacent ante-room, where banks of flowers, and a couple of sofas and low easy-chairs made a retreat which was half boudoir, half conservatory. She saw them moving side by side, talking to each other in tones so confidential that his head bent low over hers each

time she spoke; and then she watched them sitting side by side just within the doorway, at an angle where she could see their faces, and attitudes, still in the same confidential converse, she with downcast eyes, and he leaning forward with his elbow on his knee, and looking up at her as he talked.

"It is too bad of him," muttered Tabitha, writhing at that spectacle. "Does he think what a child she is, and what harm he may be doing? It is wicked of him, and he knows it; and other people must notice them—other people must see what I see—and they will be talking of her, blighting her good name. Oh, if I could only get her away at once before people begin to notice her."

She could see her young mistress's face distinctly in the lamplight. Isola was very pale, and her face was full of trouble; not the face of a woman amusing herself with an idle flirtation, playing with fire without the least intention of burning her fingers. There were plenty of flirtations of that order going on in the Talbot ball-room; but this was not one of them. This meant peril of some kind. This was all evil. That pale

face, those heavy eyelids, shrouding eyes which dared not look up. That tremulous uncertain movement of the snowy ostrich fan! All these were danger signals.

"If I get her safe at home presently, I'll open her eyes for her," thought Tabitha. "I'll talk to her as if I was her mother. God knows I should be almost as sorry as ever her mother could be if she came to any harm."

If she came to any harm. What harm was there to fear for her, as she sat there, with Lostwithiel lounging across the low chair beside the sofa where she sat, leaning forward to look into her downcast face? What harm could come to her except that which meant destruction—death to peace, and gladness, and womanly fame? If there were danger it was a desperate danger, and Tabitha shuddered at the mere thought of that peril.

"But, lor, she's little more than a child," mused Tabitha. "She means no wrong, and she knows no wrong. She's too innocent to come to any harm."

Yet, in the landlady's snuggery, by-and-by, seated at the comfortable round table, with its

spotless damask and bright glass and silver, Tabitha was quite unable to do justice to that snack which Mr. Tinkerly had ordered in her honour—a chicken and lobster-salad from the supper-room, and three parts of a pine-apple cream. Susan and the foreman fully appreciated these dainties; but Tabitha only munched a crust and sipped a tumbler of beer.

"I'm a little bit out of sorts to-night," she said.

"I hope you haven't taken cold, Mrs. Thomas," said the polite Tinkerly. "Perhaps we ought to have brought another rug?"

"No, it isn't that. I've been quite warm and comfortable. Eat your supper, Mr. Tinkerly, and don't bother about me. I've been interested in looking on, and I'm too much took up with what I've seen to be able to eat."

"Well, it was a pretty sight," exclaimed Tinkerly, enthusiastically; "but I don't think I ever saw such a mort of plain women in my life."

"Lor, Mr. Tinkerly," cried Susan, with a shocked air. "Why, look at our young mistress, and at Miss Crowther, and Miss Spenthrop

from Truro, and Mrs. Pencarrow, and Lady Chanderville."

"Well, I don't say they're all ugly. Some of 'em are handsome enough, and there's plenty of thorough-breds among 'em, but there's a sight of plain-headed ones. There's quite as much beauty in your spear as there is among the county folks, Miss Susan. I'll answer for that."

The night was waning. Isola had ordered her carriage for half-past two: but three o'clock had struck from the church tower of Lostwithiel, and the dance was still at its height—at its best, the dancers said, now that the sensual attractions of the supper-room drew off a good many people, and left the floor so much clearer than before supper, when bulky middle-aged gentlemen, talking to the matrons seated upon the divan, had projected their ponderous persons into the orbit of the waltzers.

Isola and Lostwithiel had danced only two waltzes, but since two o'clock they had sat out several dances, Mrs. Disney having cancelled all her engagements after that hour by declaring that she would dance no more.

"I am dreadfully tired," she told her partners piteously, and her pallor gave force to the assertion. "Please get some one else for our dance, Captain Morshead," and so on, and so on, to half a dozen disappointed suitors.

Perhaps some of those who happened to be experienced in such complications may have divined which way the wind blew, for no one offered to sit out the promised dances, and Isola and Lostwithiel were left pretty much to themselves among the palms and orange-trees in the ante-room. They were not unobserved, however; and among the eyes which marked them with no friendly notice were the fine, steel-blue eyes of Miss Crowther.

"Is that a flirtation?" she asked Captain Morshead, glancing in the direction of the ante-room where those two were sitting, as she and Isola's cast-off partner waltzed past the muslin-draped doorway.

"They seem rather fond of talking to each other, don't they? Who was she? She's uncommonly pretty."

"Oh, her people were army, I believe—as poor as church mice—buried alive in Dinan."

"At Dinan—and now she lives at Trelasco, she tells me. It seems scarcely worth while to have exhumed her in order to bury her again. Such a girl as that ought to be in London enjoying life."

"Oh, but she's a grass widow, don't you know. Her husband is in Burmah. I don't think it's quite nice in her to be here to-night; only as my too good-natured mother sent her a ticket, I suppose I oughtn't to say anything about it. Perhaps if mother sees the way she goes on with Lord Lostwithiel she'll rather regret that ticket."

What was he saying all this time in that gentle baritone, which was heard only by one listener? He was asking her forgiveness for his indiscretion of the afternoon, and in that prayer for pardon was repeating his offence. She was less inclined to be angry, perhaps, now. The magic of the dance was still upon her senses, the dance which had brought them nearer than all the days they had met; than all their long confidential conversations on the heights above the harbour, or on the river path, or dawdling on the bridge. She had felt the

beating of his heart against her own, breath mingling with breath, the thrilling touch of his encircling arm; and it was as if he had woven a spell around her which made her his. She had never danced with her husband, who had no love of that heathenish art. In all their brisk, frank courtship there had been no intoxicating hours. She hardly knew what dancing meant till she waltzed with Lostwithiel, who had something of the fiery ardour of a Pagan worshipping his gods in wild gyrations upon moonlit mountain or in secret cave. She let him talk to her to-night—let him pour out the full confession of his unhappy love. He spoke not as one who had hope; not with that implied belief in her frailty which would have startled her into prompt resistance. His accents were the accents of despair, his love was a dark fatality.

'ΑΝΑΓΚΗ.

"Why did you write that word on my programme?" she asked.

"Why? Because I could not give you back that card without some token of my passion—with only commonplace entries which Jones,

Brown, and Robinson might write there. I want you to feel that you belong to me, somehow, in some way, as the spirits of the dead and the souls of the living belong to each other sometimes, by links which none can see. When I am at the other end of the earth I want to feel that there is something, if it were only a word, like a masonic sign, between us; if it were only a promise that in such or such a phase of the waning moon we would each look up and breathe the other's name."

"You are going away?"

"What else can I do? Can I stay? You tell me I made you miserable by what I said this afternoon. That means we must meet no more. I can't be sorry for my offence. I cannot answer for myself. My love has passed the point of sanity and self-control. I have no option. I must offend you, or I must leave you."

"You need not leave Trelasco," she said gently, "I am going away to-morrow."

"Going away. Where?"

"To London first, and then to India."

"To Burmah? Impossible!"

"If not to the front, to the nearest convenient station. I am going to my husband; as nearly as I can reach him; and as quickly as I can make the journey."

"You are dreaming."

"No, I have quite made up my mind. I hated to be left behind last year; and now that his return is deferred my only chance of happiness is to go to him. Some one called me a grass widow the other day. What a detestable name!"

"Give me this one waltz?" he asked, without any comment upon her intended journey.

"Impossible. I told them all I shouldn't dance any more."

"Oh, your partners are all in the supper-room, I dare say. The dancing men go in last. Hark! it's the Myosotis. Just one turn—only one."

He had risen from his low seat, and she rose involuntarily at the sound of the opening bars. He put his arm round her gently, and drew her into the ball-room, waltzing slowly as they went, and then, with the sudden impetus of an enthusiastic dancer, he was whirling her round the

room, and she knew nothing, cared for nothing, in the confusion of light and melody.

"Think of me sometimes when you are far away!" he whispered, with his lips almost touching her forehead.

She did not resent that whisper. Already, within a dozen hours of his first offence, she had grown accustomed to his words of love. It seemed to her as if they had loved each other for years—had loved and had despaired long ago, in some dim half-remembered past. A passion of this kind is like a dream, in which an instant gives the impression of half a life-time, of long memories and old habit.

The room was much clearer now.

"Is it very late?" asked Isola.

"About four."

"So late—and I told the flyman half-past two. It is dreadful. Let us stop, please."

He obeyed, and went with her towards the cloak-room. The seats were nearly empty now where the matrons had sat in their velvet and brocade, a gorgeous background to the clouds of tulle and sylph-like figures of the dancers. Mrs. Baynham was nowhere to be seen, and the

diminished bundles of tabby-cat cloaks and Shetland shawls in the cloak-room indicated that a good many people had left. Isola put on her soft white shawl hurriedly, and went out into the hall, where Lostwithiel had gone to look for her carriage.

People were going away very fast, and through the open doorway there was a sound of voices and wheels; but, in spite of footmen, constables, and hangers-on, there seemed a prodigious difficulty in getting any particular carriage to the door.

It was a mild, misty night, and the moon, which had been counted on for the return home, was hidden behind a mass of black clouds—or in the expressive phraseology of one of the foxhunters, had gone to ground. Mrs. Disney waited near the door while Lostwithiel searched for her fly. There were several departures of other muffled figures, features undistinguishable behind Shetland wraps, or furry hoods, as the men hustled their womenkind into the carriages. It seemed an age to Isola, waiting there alone in the corridor, and seeing no mortal whom she knew among those passers-by, before Lost-

withiel came, hurried and breathless, to say that her carriage was just coming up to the door.

"Wrap your shawl round your head," he said quickly, as he gave her his arm. "There's a nasty damp fog—so," muffling her, almost to blindness. "Come along."

She looked at the carriage, with its lamps shining red against the gray mistiness like great fiery eyes, and then, glancing at the horse, she cried suddenly, "I'm afraid that's the wrong fly. I think mine had a grey horse."

"No, no, it's all right. Pray don't loiter in this chilling air."

The carriage door was open, the constable standing by, bull's-eye in hand, a pair of horses snorting close behind, another carriage coming up so near that the pole threatened destruction. There was no time for loitering. Everybody was in a hurry to get home. Isola stepped lightly into the brougham, which drove slowly off.

"Next carriage, Mrs. Brune Prideaux," roared the constable. "Mrs. Prideaux' carriage stops all the way."

CHAPTER VI.

"A LOVE STILL BURNING UPWARD."

It was early summer, summer in her first youth, when she is frivolous and capricious, laughs and weeps she knows not why; smiling through her tears, and never knowing her own mind for a week together; to-day gracious-tempered and tropical; to-morrow east-windy and morose. In a word, it was June, a season of roses and rains, blue skies and thunder-clouds. It was June, and Martin Disney was looking out of the window with a keen eager face, much bronzed, and somewhat haggard, after a fatiguing campaign, looking out across the vales and woods of his native county, as the Penzance train sped along the high-level line betwixt Plymouth and Par. Those keen, grey eyes of his, accustomed to searching out far-off objects, looked as if they

could pierce through the green heart of the Cornish valleys to the sheltered little harbour of Fowey and the blue sea that opened wide to the far-off West.

His labours were over, and he was going to take his rest, going to hang up his sword, that sword which had done such good work, or to transform it into a reaping-hook. He was Colonel Disney now, had given the State his best service, and now, in the very prime and vigour of his manhood, the State had done with him, and he was free to do what he listed with the maturer half of his life. He would have been very sorry to retire from active service had it not been for that tender tie which gave such sweetness to the thought of retirement and tranquil days. He was going home. The word thrilled him like music; home to his fair young wife, his chosen one, his domestic divinity. He had not left off wondering how it had ever come to pass that so young and fair a creature could care for him.

"It isn't as if I were one of your accomplished fellows," he said to himself, "able to sing, or play the flute, or paint in water-colours. Except a

very earnest love of a few good books, I have no culture. How can any girl in the present day care for a man without culture? I could never appreciate Keats, for instance; and not to appreciate Keats is to be an outsider in literature."

Yet, in spite of his seven and forty years, in spite of his deficiencies, his homeliness, that young heart had gone out to him. She loved him, and his lot was full. There was nothing more upon God's earth that he could desire, were it not a miracle, and that the mother he had so fondly loved might be given back to him, to share his happiness, to make the third in a trinity of trusting love. Since that could not be, there was nothing left for him to yearn for.

The beating of his heart quickened almost unbearably, as the train drew near Par. Isola would meet him at the junction, perhaps. He had not announced the actual hour of his arrival, for matters had been a little uncertain when he wrote yesterday, and he had not cared to telegraph this morning before he left Paddington. Yet she would know that this was the only likely train for him to choose; and she would be at the Junction, he thought, smiling her glad

welcome, a fair young face, rosy in the sunset; for it was evening as he drew near the end of his journey.

No; there was nobody he knew at the Junction. He walked up and down the platform, and stared about him in rather a forlorn way during the few minutes before the starting of the train for Fowey. She had not come to anticipate their meeting by an hour or so, as he had hoped, as he had felt almost certain, she would come.

It was more natural that she should wait and receive him at the Angler's Nest, he told himself, sitting in the corner of the railway carriage presently, in a train of three coaches, steaming through the pretty picturesque country between Par and Fowey. In the colder light of reason it seemed preposterous to have expected to see her at the Junction. She would like to welcome him amidst her own surroundings, in the home to which she had doubtless given those little beautifying touches in honour of his coming, which are such delight to women, and which sometimes pass altogether unobserved by that pachydermatous animal, man. How slowly the engine moved along that little bit of line.

Martin Disney sat with his face to the wind, and snuffed the sea breeze as if it had been the odour of home. He thought of Ulysses, and his return from distant lands. Would Tim, the fox terrier, know him? and Shah, the Persian cat? Perhaps not. Tim was no Argus; vastly affectionate and demonstrative, but not a dog to expire at one's feet, in the rapture of his master's return. Penelope would know him, and welcome him. That was enough for this modern Ulysses, who had no reason to disguise himself in re-entering his home—who had no fear of rival suitors, or interlopers of any kind. Penelope would welcome him, and trusty Tabitha. He thought of the old servant's honest face with delight. She was something left to him out of boyhood and youth. He felt like a young man when he talked to her. She was the one strong link betwixt the present and the past. She was his memory embodied. He could refer to her as to a dictionary of days long gone. When did we do such and such a thing—or go to such a place—what was the name of the bay horse I bought at Plympton? Where did my mother pick up the Sheraton secretaire? Tabitha could answer

all such trivial questions: and Tabitha could talk to him for hours of his mother's words and ways—of the things that were only history.

At last! The train crept into the little station, nestling on the edge of a wood, and there was Fowey, homely, friendly little Fowey, so strange and yet so familiar; strange to eyes that had so lately looked upon the cities of the East; familiar to the man who had been reared in the neighbourhood, whose first impressions of God's earth had stamped harbour and hills upon his brain, like an indelible picture. There was Masters's fly, an eminently respectable vehicle that never touted for chance passengers, waiting for him. He was expected, evidently.

"Did Mrs. Disney send you?" he asked the driver.

"Yes, sir."

How thoughtful of the young wife, who might be forgiven if she had left such a small duty unfulfilled. Yet he would have liked to see her sweet self at the station—only, as he had argued with himself just now, it would have discounted the home-welcome. It would have been an anti-climax.

Dearly as he loved that home river, and those fertile hills, and beautiful as they were after their kind, they could but seem small and tame to eyes that had looked upon the glories of the East. Disney contemplated the scene with a touch of sad surprise, wondering at this miniature loveliness; recalling the day when those steep hillsides, where the red cattle were grazing in the mists of eventide, had seemed grand in his sight. Now they had a kind of pitiful prettiness. His heart yearned towards them with compassion for their insignificance.

For nearly two years he had been moving about with his company in the land of jungle and mountain, and in that vast table-land through which the Salween river runs down to the Gulf of Martaban; and after those wider horizons, he found himself in a narrow road, shut in by grassy hills, and hugging the margin of a silver thread that called itself a river.

There is always a tinge of melancholy in that hour after sundown; and Martin Disney's heart saddened a little as he looked at the quiet river, and the shadows on the hillside—that pale mistiness of summer evening which gives a

ghostly touch to all things, as if it were a brief revelation of a spirit world. It is an hour at which even a strong man's heart is apt to sink with a vague sense of fear.

The fly drew up at the little wooden gate between high hedges of escalonia, with glossy leaves and bright red blossom. A slender figure in a white gown was visible on the threshold, as Disney sprang out of the fly, and while the flyman was lifting down the luggage, that airy form flitted across the lawn, and Colonel Disney's wife was standing shyly within the open gate, almost as if she had come out to receive a stranger.

He could not clasp her to his breast before a flyman; but he seized both her hands, gripped them convulsively, and then led her towards the house, leaving Masters's man to deal as he pleased with portmanteaux and hat-box, gun-case and umbrella-case, despatch-box, and other chattels; to leave them out in the lane to the dews and the night-birds, if he so listed. Martin Disney had no consciousness of anything in this world except the woman by his side.

"My darling! my darling!" he ejaculated, in

a choked voice, "how I have longed for this hour, with a longing that has been almost madness."

And then he saw for the first time that her face was as white as her gown. Was it the twilight that made her look so pale. Could he wonder if the emotion of this supreme moment blanched that young cheek, when he, soldier and wayfarer upon the world's roughest roads, felt like a child, striving to hold back his tears?

Lamps were burning in dining-room and drawing-room. He saw the table laid for dinner through the open door as he and Isola passed by; but the idea of eating and drinking seemed very far off just now. They went into the drawing-room together, where a solitary lamp was shining upon a table crowded with flowers, and where the scents of the garden came in through the open window. Here he satisfied the longing of his hungry heart, and took that fragile form in his arms, and kissed the pale cold lips. She lay upon his breast unresistingly; helpless, unresponsive, like a dead thing.

"Isola, have you forgotten that you once loved me?"

"Forgotten! No, no, no! There is no one in the world so good and true as you are. I love you with all my heart and soul."

Her face was hidden on his breast, but she lifted up her arms and clasped them round his neck. He seated himself in his accustomed chair —it was standing where it had always stood before he went away—and took her upon his knee, as if she had been a child. Then a great storm of sobs suddenly burst from throat and bosom, a flood of tears streamed upon his breast, and he felt her arms trembling as they clasped his neck.

"My own dear love," he murmured gently, "one would almost think you were sorry I have come back."

She could not answer him at first for her sobs, but she shook her head, and at last the words, "No, no, no," came from her lips; and he kissed and calmed her with almost fatherly gentleness. And then they went into the dining-room, where the soup-tureen was waiting for them on the sideboard, with a neat little parlour-maid—not Susan, but another—ready to minister to them.

The table had been decorated by Isola's own hands. Dark crimson roses were lying on the fair white damask; one tall glass stood in the centre with three slim golden lilies, pale and heavy-headed, which filled the room with perfume. These came from one of the hothouses at Glenaveril, whence good-natured Mrs. Crowther had sent a basket of exotics in honour of the colonel's return. The lamplight, the flowers, the pretty old Wedgwood service of creamy white and dull brown, made up a feast for Martin Disney's eye, after a life spent mostly under canvas. He looked from the gaily adorned table to the face beside him, pallid and pinched, despite its sweetness.

"My dear one, you are looking very ill," he said, with an anxious air.

"What an ungallant speech," she answered, smiling at him with unexpected gaiety. "I have been fretting at your long, long absence, and you reproach me for my deteriorated appearance. Never mind, Martin, you will see how rosy and bright I shall get now our parting has come to an end."

"Yes, love, we must coax the roses back to

your cheeks. I must have a good mount ready for you when the cubbing begins, and a few morning gallops will soon make a change in my fragile wife's appearance. And I'll charter a yacht, and steep you in ozone."

"Oh, one gets enough of that on shore, there is no need to go further."

"But I thought you adored yachting? It was one of our grand schemes for the future, to hire a modest little yawl and go round the coast to Clovelly. Have you forgotten?"

"No, no; only I don't want you to waste your money—and, if we start a bigger stable——"

"Ah, you don't know what a Crœsus I have become. You needn't be afraid of ruining me. My poor lonely little wife. Why didn't you send for Allegra?"

"She wouldn't have been of any good to me. She is all that is sweet and lovable, and she is your sister; but she wouldn't have filled your vacant place. I should have only felt lonelier for having to talk every day, and pretend a kind of happiness. Being alone, I could bury myself in a book, and forget my troubles."

"This soup doesn't look up to Tabitha's old

form. Do you know that among other delights of this earthly paradise I have been looking forward to Tabitha's little dinners. I don't believe there is a *chef* in Paris who can cook so well as that self-taught genius, who ripened into perfection by a process of gradual evolution, from the early days when my mother discovered that nobody could make arrowroot or cook a mutton cutlet as well as Tabitha. By-the-by, why has not that good soul shown herself? I thought she would have disputed with you for my first kiss."

While he ran on in this fashion, Isola sat looking down at the table-cloth, pallid no longer, but crimson.

"Tabitha has gone!" she said abruptly.

"Tabitha gone—for a holiday?"

"No, she has left me, altogether."

"Left you—altogether?" exclaimed Disney, with the tone of a man who could scarcely believe in his own sense of hearing, so astounding was the statement that met his ears. "Tabitha, my mother's faithful old servant, who was like my own flesh and blood! What in God's name made her leave you? Did you quarrel with her?"

He asked the question almost sternly. For the first time in his life he was angry with this dear fragile creature, the idol of his heart. He had loved Tabitha as servants are not often loved. He had left his young wife in her charge, desiring no better custodian, full of faith in Tabitha's ability both to protect and counsel her girlish mistress.

"No, no; we did not quarrel. I liked Tabitha very much. I was almost as fond of her as you yourself could be."

"And yet you dismissed her!" Disney retorted bitterly. "She was not smart enough for you, perhaps. Those Crowther people may have put it into your head that she was old-fashioned—that you could never have a modish household with such a humdrum old person at the head of it. Was that your motive?"

"Oh, Martin, how can you think me so frivolous? I hate smartness and pretension as much as you do. No, I should never have dismissed Tabitha. She left me of her own accord."

"Why?"

"She wanted rest. She was too old for service,

she told me. I tried to keep her. I humiliated myself so far as to beg her to stay with me"—the tears came into her eyes at the mere memory of that humiliation—"but she had made up her mind. She would not give way."

"Where did she go?"

"To Falmouth—to live with her sister, a shoemaker's widow. They let lodgings, I believe."

"She must have gone mad! A lodging-house must be harder work than anything she had to do here."

"Yes, I think it must."

"When did she go?"

"At the beginning of the year—in January."

"She left you six months ago, and in all that time you never told me she was gone."

"I did not want you to know, for fear you should be worried or vexed."

"I should have been both; but you ought to have told me. I had a right to know. I left you in her charge, Isola. You are much too young and too pretty to be living alone without some kind of dragon—and I knew Tabitha would be a very gentle dragon—a good motherly soul, able to wait upon you and look after your health,

and yet grim enough to keep marauders off the premises. Indeed, my pet, you should have let me know of her departure without an hour's delay. She was very wrong to go. It was a breach of faith I could never have expected."

"Pray don't be angry with her, Martin."

"But I am angry. I have a right to be angry. I'll go to Falmouth to-morrow, and have it out with her."

"No, no, pray don't! We parted good friends. She can say nothing to you more than she said to me. Pray don't let there be any bad blood between you. What could be gained by your going? To-morrow, too—our very first day together!"

"Well, it shall not be till the day after; but go I must. To-morrow I will revel in the delights of home, and my dear one's society. To-morrow I will be drunken with joy. The day after will do for Tabitha."

"I think it is making a great deal too much of her to go to Falmouth on purpose to see her," said Isola, with a grain of pettishness; and then, after a pause, during which the colonel had been trying to appease a sharp appetite with

the muscular leg of an elderly fowl, she said nervously—

"I'm afraid you are not enjoying your dinner."

"What do I care for dinner on such a night as this; but, as a matter of plain truth, I must say that your new cook is a very bad substitute for Tabitha. Her soup was watery, her fish was greasy, her poultry is hardly eatable. If she has talents in any other line she is keeping them in reserve for another day. It may be that she excels in made-dishes—a misfortune for me, as I never eat them."

"I had a splendid character with her," said Isola, piteously, with the helpless feeling of a housewife who sees before her a dark prospect of bad dinners and marital grumblings, or the agonizing wrench involved in changing her cook.

"Yes, my love, people generally give splendid characters to servants they want to get rid of," answered Disney, dryly.

These wedded lovers went out very early next morning to explore the gardens and meadows; Isola eager to point out various small improve-

ments which she had made with the help of the old gardener, who would have plunged his hand and arm into a fiery furnace to procure plant or flower which his young mistress desired. Sweet words and sweet looks go very far in this world. They are a mighty revenue, and will often do their owner as good service as gold and silver.

Isola had worked in the garden with her own hands ever since the beginning of spring, the first tender opening of Earth's heavy eyelids, her first pale smile of snowdrops, her broad laughter of daffodils, her joyous peal of bluebells, and riotous mirth of May blossom. She had toiled in the sweat of her brow so that the garden might be beautiful at midsummer: for early in March there had come a letter full of rejoicing from that distant hill-kingdom, and she knew that the year of absence to which she had looked so hopelessly last November was commuted to half a year.

Martin Disney was full of admiration for his wife's improvements. The old-fashioned borders were brimming over with old-world flowers; the shrubberies had grown out of knowledge; the

escalonia hedge by the kitchen garden was a thing to wonder at.

"I remember the hedge at Tregenna Castle before that good old place was an inn," said Martin; and then, having admired everything, he walked up and down the grass beside the laurel hedge with his wife—while the Satan-sent cook was spoiling the food that bounteous Nature had provided for man's enjoyment—and questioned her about the life she had been leading in his absence.

"You used to write me such good letters, dearest, so full of detail, that I knew exactly how your days were spent, and could picture every hour of your life: but of late your descriptive powers have flagged. I dare say you got tired of writing long letters to a dull old fellow in India, who could never write you a clever letter in reply. It must have seemed a one-sided business?"

"Indeed, no, dear. Your letters had only one fault. They were never half long enough; but I knew how busy you were, and I thought it was so good of you never to miss a mail."

"Good of me! Had there been twice as

many mails I would not have willingly missed one. But there is no doubt your letters fell off after last autumn. They were sweet, and ever welcome to me—but they told me very little."

"There was very little to tell."

"Ah, but in the old days you used to make it seem so much. You had such a delightful way of describing trifling events. I thought at one time you had the makings of a Jane Austen; but afterwards I began to fear you must be out of health. Your letters had a low-spirited tone. There were no more of those sharp little touches which used to make me laugh, no more of those tiny word-pictures, which brought the faces and figures of my old neighbours before me."

"You can hardly wonder if my spirits sank a little when you had been so long away. And then life seemed so death-like in its monotony. There were days when I felt I might just as well have been dead. There could be very little difference between lying under the earth and crawling listlessly on the top of it."

"You were too much alone, Isola," he answered, distressed at this revelation. "You

ought to have sent for Allegra. I begged you to do so, if you felt dull."

"Do you think she could have cured my dulness?" exclaimed his wife impatiently. "I think life would have seemed still more tiresome if I had been obliged to talk when there was nothing to talk about, and to smile when I felt inclined to cry."

"Ah, you don't know what a companion Allegra is—brimming over with fun! She knows her Dickens by heart; and I never met with anybody who appreciated him as intensely as she does."

"I don't care about Dickens."

"Don't—care—about Dickens!"

He echoed her words as if almost paralyzed by horror.

"Not as I used to care. One's taste changes as life goes on. Lately I have read nothing but Shakespeare, and Keats, and Shelley."

"Very well in their way, but not half cheery enough for a lonely little woman beside the Fowey river. You ought to have had Allegra. It would have been better for you and better for her. She is tired of the art school; and the

other pupils are tired of her. They are very fond of her; but she has done all the work twice over, and there is nothing more for her to do, unless we meant her to enter the Royal Academy and go in seriously for art, Mrs. Meynell tells me. According to that lady's account my sister must be an Admirable Crichton in petticoats."

"I have no doubt she is very clever and very nice; but, as I could not have you, I preferred being alone," answered Isola.

She was walking slowly by his side along the closely shaven grass, and every now and then she stretched out a hand that looked semi-transparent, and gathered a flower at random, and then plucked off its petals nervously as she walked on. Her eyelids were lowered, and her lips were tightly set. Martin could but think there was a vein of obstinacy in this bewitching wife of his—a gentle resistance which would tend to make him her slave rather than her master in the days to come. He saw with pain that her cheeks were hollow and pinched, and that her delicate complexion had a sickly whiteness. She had fretted evidently in those long months of solitude, and it would take time to

bring back the colour and gaiety to her face. As for dulness, well, no doubt Fowey was ever so much duller than Dinan, where there were officers and tennis-parties and afternoon tea-drinkings, and a going and coming of tourists all the summer through, and saints' days, and processions, and *fêtes* and illuminations in the market square, beneath the statue of Duguesclin.

"And how did the world use you, Isola?" he asked presently. "Was everybody kind?"

"Oh yes, people were very kind; especially Mrs. Baynham and Mrs. Crowther. They sent me ever so many invitations, and wanted me to go on their day every week."

"And I hope you accepted their invitations."

"I went to Mrs. Baynham's sometimes on her day; but I didn't care about going to Glenaveril. It is all too grand and too fine—and I don't like Mr. Crowther."

"He was always courteous to you, I hope?"

"Oh yes, he was particularly courteous. I have no reason for disliking him. He is my Dr. Fell—the reason why I cannot tell, but I would walk a mile to avoid meeting him."

"Then we will not cultivate social relations

with Glenaveril. We will visit at no house where my dearest does not feel happy and at ease. And as for the finery, I agree with you, there is something too much of it. I like powder and plush when the people they serve are to the manner born, and when powder and plush seem more natural than parlourmaids; but I don't care for the solemn stateliness of a big establishment when it has been newly set up—at least, not by such folks as the Crowthers. There are some men to whom such surroundings seem natural, even though fortune has come late in life. Is the beautiful Belinda married yet?"

"No. I do not think she is as much as engaged?"

"I thought Lostwithiel would have married her. She would have been a grand catch for him, and no doubt she would have snapped at a coronet, even without strawberry leaves. But I hear he is in South America orchid-hunting. He was always a capricious individual. There goes the gong for breakfast. I hope your cook can fry a rasher and boil an egg better than she can dress a dinner."

They went in together to the pretty dining-

room, so bright with books and flowers, and a life-sized girlish head in water-colours, by Dobson, R.A., over the chimney-piece, and Venetian glass here and there, that all characteristics of the ordinary eating-room were effaced, and only a sense of homeliness and artistic surroundings was left. Isola had been down at six, and her own hands had given the finishing touches to the room, and the flowers were of that morning's gathering, and had the dew and the perfume of morning upon them. The room was so pretty, and Isola was so much prettier than the room, that a husband would have been of very dull clay had he troubled himself about the handiwork of the cook. Martin Disney was not made of dull clay, and he ate an overdone rasher and a hard-boiled egg without a murmur, and then set out for a long ramble with Isola.

They went up to the hill upon whose landward slope stood Lostwithiel's old grey manor-house, with its gardens and park. Isola had not been there since that never-to-be-forgotten November evening when she met Lostwithiel in the rain. She had avoided the spot from that time forward, though she had no especial reason for avoidance,

since there was no one there but Mrs. Mayne and her underlings. Lostwithiel and the *Vendetta* had sailed away into space directly after the Hunt Ball, and little had been heard of him save that dim rumour of orchid-hunting on the shores of the Amazon, which had filtered from the society papers down to Fowey, *via* the *Western Daily Mercury*.

Isola and her husband lingered for a long time upon the hilltop, he revelling in the familiar beauty of that magnificent stretch of cliff and sea, out to the dim slate colour of the Dodman Point, bay beyond bay, curving away towards Falmouth and the Lizard—while between that hill and the sea lay a world of fertile meadows and yellow corn, of hill and hollow, wood and common, copse and garden, a rich and smiling country, a land of summer flowers and plenteous growth.

"I never stand upon this hill without feeling proud of being a Cornishman," said Disney, "and yet, after all, it is a foolish thing to be proud of an accident. My little Breton girl might as well be proud of being a countrywoman of Duguesclin's."

"Perhaps if I had been born anywhere else I should not have been so ready to fall in love with a soldier," answered Isola. "I was brought up to think a knight and a warrior the one ideal: and so I was fascinated by the first soldier who took any notice of me."

"But were you really fascinated, and were you really in love," exclaimed Disney, infinitely delighted at this little speech of his wife's, "in love with a battered campaigner of five and forty—or did you just think you liked me a little bit, only because you wanted to get away from Dinan?"

"I really—really—really loved you," she answered softly, looking up at him with eyes dimmed by tears, as he drew her nearer to him in his gladness. "I was not tired of Dinan—or my life there—and my heart went out to you at once, because you were good and noble, and seemed to care for me."

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"Why do you sigh as you say that?"

"Oh, one always sighs for the past! How can one help feeling sorry that it should be gone—so much of our lives and of ourselves gone for ever?"

"Oh, but when the future is so fair, when the present is so happy, there should be no more sighing. It is an offence against the Great Father of all, who has been so good to us."

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"Doubly vexed, dear, because you left me in ignorance of the fact."

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"Rather a meaningless dream," she said, in a sleepy voice, without looking up. "I don't think it ought to have alarmed you."

"Ah, it sounds meaningless to you; but to me it was full of meaning! The idea of danger to you was so intense—so real. The cold sweat of deadly fear was on my face when I awoke, and it was some minutes before I could get my senses clear of that ghastly horror, before I could realize where I was, and that the thing I had seen was a dream. That hideous wall seemed still in front of me, and I had still the feeling that you were on the other side of it, in ever-increasing peril."

"It was a horrid dream, certainly; but, you see, it had no meaning."

"There were such strange things mixed up in it—thunder and lightning, a roaring wind, a sound of rushing waters; and then, amidst wind and thunder, there rose the black stony barrier that shut out everything."

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"Yes, a long while. It was just before Christmas. I made a note of the dream in my journal—wrote it down in fear and trembling, lest there should be some kind of fulfilment. But then came your letter—written at the beginning of January, with your description of the ball—and I laughed at my folly in brooding so long upon that phantasmal picture. I remember, by the way, it was two or three nights after your ball that I dreamt my dream, while you no doubt were sleeping just a little sounder than usual after your gaieties."

"Dreams are very strange," said Isola, absently. "I wonder whether there is any good in them to counterbalance so much pain?"

CHAPTER VII.

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TRUE WIFE."

THERE were steamers plying between Fowey and Falmouth in this summer weather, and Colonel Disney suggested next morning that Isola should go with him on his journey in search of Tabitha. They would go by water and return in the afternoon by rail. The morning was lovely, and the trip round the coast would be delightful.

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"But I had rather not spend a whole day away from you. As for Tabitha, a visit of ten minutes will be quite enough for me. I have

brought her a Rhampoor Chuddah—a warm red one. I have only to make her my little gift, and to say a few words—without any anger—about her breach of faith."

"It was really not a breach of faith. I gave her full permission to go. I was getting just a little tired of her fussiness. She was not *my* old servant, you know, Martin. I had not been used to her all my life, as you have."

"Ah, but she is so good—such a thoroughly good woman."

"Yes, she is good, no doubt."

"Well, we'll go to Falmouth together, and you can stop at the Green Bank, where we can lunch, while I go and find Tabitha. You know her address, I suppose?"

"Yes. She lives at No. 5, Crown Terrace, overlooking the harbour."

This conversation took place in the garden, where they breakfasted, under a square striped awning, an apology for a tent, set up on the lawn by the river. A badly cooked breakfast seemed less offensive in the garden, where the summer air, and the perfume of the roses eked out the meal. After breakfast Disney called his

wife to the drawing-room, where he had brought his spoil from the East, and laid his offerings, as it were, at the feet of his idol.

"See, love, here is a shawl which you can use as a *couvre-pied*," he said, flinging a fine cashmere over a chair, "since Fashion decrees that women shall wear shawls no more. And here are some ivory chessmen to assist you in puzzling your brains over the game of Eastern antiquity; and here are vases and things for odd corners. And I have brought you a carved Persian screen, and some Peshawur curtains for your doorways, and a lamp from Cairo, to make your drawing-room a little more fantastically pretty. I know you love these things."

She was enraptured with his gifts. Her face lighted up like the face of a child, and she ran from one object to the other in a confused gladness, scarcely able to look at one thing at a time.

"They will make the room too lovely," she cried; "and they will tell everybody of your far-away travels. I can never thank you half enough for all these treasures."

"Love me a little, and that will be more than enough."

"A little. Ah, Martin, I love you so much."

"Then why do you sigh as you say it? There need be no sighing in our love now. I never shall leave you again."

He caught her to his breast as he spoke, and kissed the pale sweet face, with a kind of defiant rapture, as if he challenged Fate to do him any further evil. The pain of separation from that fair young wife had been so keen an agony that there was a touch of savage exultancy in the joy of re-union—some such fierce gladness as a knight-crusader might have felt in days of old, coming back to his beloved after years of war and travel.

God help the crusader's wife of those rough days if she had turned from the path of virtue during his exile. There would be a short shrift and a bloody shroud for such a sinner!

They walked into Fowey by that pathway which Isola had trodden so often in the year that was gone—not always alone. The pleasure steamer was waiting in the little haven, where the two rivers part under the cloven hills. Out seaward the air blew fresh and free, and the spray was dashing up against the rocks, and Polruan's

grey roofs were wrapped in morning shadows while Fowey laughed in the sunshine.

That water journey to Falmouth was delicious upon such a morning, and it needed not a very doubtful brass band of three and a boy, blaring out the new and popular music-hall song of the year before last, to enliven the voyage. Those arable lands yonder, undulating with every curve of the ever-varying coast-line, the emerald green of young corn shining in the sunlight, copse and spinny here and there in the clefts and hollows, the Gribbin Head standing up stony and grim on the crest of the topmost hill, and, anon, Par harbour lying low upon the level sands, and then this point and that, till they meet the little fleet of gallant fishing-boats sailing out from Mevagissey, like a peaceful Armada, and skim past the haven, and the little town and quay crowded at the foot of the hill, and the coastguard's stronghold yonder, high up against the bright blue sky, whiter than any other mortal habitation ever was or will be. And so to Falmouth, with porpoises playing under their bows, like sportive dolphins, as if they carried Dionysius or Arion on their deck—a brief summer sail, in the

keen sweet air of an English summer. To Martin Disney's British nostrils that atmosphere seemed soul-inspiring, the very breath of life and gladness, after the experiences of a hot-weather campaign.

And here was Falmouth, with proud Pendennis on a sunny height, and bay and harbour, town and hill, terrace above terrace, tower and steeple —the town and streets all crowded and clustered in the foreground, where the river winds inward to the heart of the land.

The Green Bank gave them cordial welcome, and luncheon was speedily spread in a private sitting-room, at a snug round table by a window overlooking the harbour—luncheon, and of the best, tongue and chicken, and salad, cherry pasty, junket and cream.

Colonel Disney applied himself to the meal with a hearty relish.

"There is just this one advantage in bad cooking at home that it makes one so thoroughly enjoy everything one gets abroad," he said, laughing at his own prowess.

"I'll try and get a better cook, if you like, Martin," Isola said, with rather a helpless air.

To a wife of one and twenty there seems such futility in worrying about a cook.

"You couldn't possibly get a worse. How long have you put up with this one?"

"Ever since Tabitha left."

"Good heavens! You have been starving upon ill-cooked food for six months. No wonder you look thin and out of health."

"I am really very well. There is nothing the matter with me."

"Yes, yes, there is a great deal the matter. A bad cook, solitude, no one to watch over you and care for you. But that is all over now. You are eating no lunch—not even that superb cherry pasty. I'll be off to find Tabitha. I shan't be more than half an hour, unless Crown terrace is at the extremity of Falmouth. Have you brought a book to read while I am away? No, foolish child. Never mind. There is the county paper, and there is the harbour, with all its life, for you to look at."

He started on his voyage of discovery, with the warm, comfortable shawl which he had bought for his mother's old servant over his arm. It was a small disappointment amidst the infinite

delight of his home-coming, but when he bought the shawl he had fancied himself putting it round Tabitha's ample shoulders in the little housekeeper's room at the Angler's Nest, a room that was just large enough to hold a linen cupboard, a tiny Pembroke table, a comfortable armchair, and Tabitha, who seemed bigger than all the furniture put together.

He was a man of warm affections, and of that constancy of mind and temper to which forgetfulness of old ties or indifference to past associations is impossible. Tabitha's image was associated with all the tenderest memories of his youth; with his mother's widowhood, and with her second marriage—a foolish marriage. At seven and thirty years of age she had taken to herself a second husband, some years her junior, in the person of George Leland, a well-meaning and highly intellectual curate with weak lungs, a union entered upon while her only son was a cadet, and which left her four years later again a widow, with an infant daughter, a child born amidst sickness and sorrow, and christened at the father's desire Allegra, as if she had entered a world of joy. Through that Indian summer of

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brought her a Rhampoor Chuddah—a warm red one. I have only to make her my little gift, and to say a few words—without any anger—about her breach of faith."

"It was really not a breach of faith. I gave her full permission to go. I was getting just a little tired of her fussiness. She was not *my* old servant, you know, Martin. I had not been used to her all my life, as you have."

"Ah, but she is so good—such a thoroughly good woman."

"Yes, she is good, no doubt."

"Well, we'll go to Falmouth together, and you can stop at the Green Bank, where we can lunch, while I go and find Tabitha. You know her address, I suppose?"

"Yes. She lives at No. 5, Crown Terrace, overlooking the harbour."

This conversation took place in the garden, where they breakfasted, under a square striped awning, an apology for a tent, set up on the lawn by the river. A badly cooked breakfast seemed less offensive in the garden, where the summer air, and the perfume of the roses eked out the meal. After breakfast Disney called his

wife to the drawing-room, where he had brought his spoil from the East, and laid his offerings, as it were, at the feet of his idol.

"See, love, here is a shawl which you can use as a *couvre-pied*," he said, flinging a fine cashmere over a chair, "since Fashion decrees that women shall wear shawls no more. And here are some ivory chessmen to assist you in puzzling your brains over the game of Eastern antiquity; and here are vases and things for odd corners. And I have brought you a carved Persian screen, and some Peshawur curtains for your doorways, and a lamp from Cairo, to make your drawing-room a little more fantastically pretty. I know you love these things."

She was enraptured with his gifts. Her face lighted up like the face of a child, and she ran from one object to the other in a confused gladness, scarcely able to look at one thing at a time.

"They will make the room too lovely," she cried; "and they will tell everybody of your far-away travels. I can never thank you half enough for all these treasures."

"Love me a little, and that will be more than enough."

"A little. Ah, Martin, I love you so much."

"Then why do you sigh as you say it? There need be no sighing in our love now. I never shall leave you again."

He caught her to his breast as he spoke, and kissed the pale sweet face, with a kind of defiant rapture, as if he challenged Fate to do him any further evil. The pain of separation from that fair young wife had been so keen an agony that there was a touch of savage exultancy in the joy of re-union—some such fierce gladness as a knight-crusader might have felt in days of old, coming back to his beloved after years of war and travel.

God help the crusader's wife of those rough days if she had turned from the path of virtue during his exile. There would be a short shrift and a bloody shroud for such a sinner!

They walked into Fowey by that pathway which Isola had trodden so often in the year that was gone—not always alone. The pleasure steamer was waiting in the little haven, where the two rivers part under the cloven hills. Out seaward the air blew fresh and free, and the spray was dashing up against the rocks, and Polruan's

grey roofs were wrapped in morning shadows while Fowey laughed in the sunshine.

That water journey to Falmouth was delicious upon such a morning, and it needed not a very doubtful brass band of three and a boy, blaring out the new and popular music-hall song of the year before last, to enliven the voyage. Those arable lands yonder, undulating with every curve of the ever-varying coast-line, the emerald green of young corn shining in the sunlight, copse and spinny here and there in the clefts and hollows, the Gribbin Head standing up stony and grim on the crest of the topmost hill, and, anon, Par harbour lying low upon the level sands, and then this point and that, till they meet the little fleet of gallant fishing-boats sailing out from Mevagissey, like a peaceful Armada, and skim past the haven, and the little town and quay crowded at the foot of the hill, and the coastguard's stronghold yonder, high up against the bright blue sky, whiter than any other mortal habitation ever was or will be. And so to Falmouth, with porpoises playing under their bows, like sportive dolphins, as if they carried Dionysius or Arion on their deck—a brief summer sail, in the

keen sweet air of an English summer. To Martin Disney's British nostrils that atmosphere seemed soul-inspiring, the very breath of life and gladness, after the experiences of a hot-weather campaign.

And here was Falmouth, with proud Pendennis on a sunny height, and bay and harbour, town and hill, terrace above terrace, tower and steeple—the town and streets all crowded and clustered in the foreground, where the river winds inward to the heart of the land.

The Green Bank gave them cordial welcome, and luncheon was speedily spread in a private sitting-room, at a snug round table by a window overlooking the harbour—luncheon, and of the best, tongue and chicken, and salad, cherry pasty, junket and cream.

Colonel Disney applied himself to the meal with a hearty relish.

"There is just this one advantage in bad cooking at home that it makes one so thoroughly enjoy everything one gets abroad," he said, laughing at his own prowess.

"I'll try and get a better cook, if you like, Martin," Isola said, with rather a helpless air.

To a wife of one and twenty there seems such futility in worrying about a cook.

"You couldn't possibly get a worse. How long have you put up with this one?"

"Ever since Tabitha left."

"Good heavens! You have been starving upon ill-cooked food for six months. No wonder you look thin and out of health."

"I am really very well. There is nothing the matter with me."

"Yes, yes, there is a great deal the matter. A bad cook, solitude, no one to watch over you and care for you. But that is all over now. You are eating no lunch—not even that superb cherry pasty. I'll be off to find Tabitha. I shan't be more than half an hour, unless Crown terrace is at the extremity of Falmouth. Have you brought a book to read while I am away? No, foolish child. Never mind. There is the county paper, and there is the harbour, with all its life, for you to look at."

He started on his voyage of discovery, with the warm, comfortable shawl which he had bought for his mother's old servant over his arm. It was a small disappointment amidst the infinite

delight of his home-coming, but when he bought the shawl he had fancied himself putting it round Tabitha's ample shoulders in the little housekeeper's room at the Angler's Nest, a room that was just large enough to hold a linen cupboard, a tiny Pembroke table, a comfortable armchair, and Tabitha, who seemed bigger than all the furniture put together.

He was a man of warm affections, and of that constancy of mind and temper to which forgetfulness of old ties or indifference to past associations is impossible. Tabitha's image was associated with all the tenderest memories of his youth; with his mother's widowhood, and with her second marriage—a foolish marriage. At seven and thirty years of age she had taken to herself a second husband, some years her junior, in the person of George Leland, a well-meaning and highly intellectual curate with weak lungs, a union entered upon while her only son was a cadet, and which left her four years later again a widow, with an infant daughter, a child born amidst sickness and sorrow, and christened at the father's desire Allegra, as if she had entered a world of joy. Through that Indian summer of

rest and country air, I fancy, after having worked so hard in her art school."

Isola gave a scarcely perceptible sigh as she bent to caress Tim, a privileged attendant of the breakfast-table.

"Object! Of course not, Martin. I shall be very pleased for your sister to come here."

"I feel very sure you will be pleased with her when you and she get upon intimate terms. You could know so little of her from that one evening in the Cavendish road."

The occasion in question was an evening in which Isola and her husband had been bidden to a friendly dinner, on their way through London, by the clergyman's widow with whom Allegra lived while she pursued her study of art at a famous school in St. John's Wood. The clergyman's widow, Mrs. Meynell, was a distant cousin of the Disneys, and Allegra's home had been with her from the time she left school. The extent of her wanderings after she was old enough to be sent to a boarding-school had been from Falmouth to Kensington, and from Kensington to St. John's Wood, with occasional holidays in the Isle of Thanet.

"I thought she was very fresh and bright and loving," answered Isola, "and I could see even in that one evening that she was very fond of you."

"Yes, God bless her, there is no doubt about that. I have been brother and father too for her. She has had no one but me since our mother's death."

"Shall I write and ask her to come to us, Martin, or will you?"

"I fancy she would take it more as a compliment if the invitation went straight from you. She would know that I would be glad to have her, but she might feel a little doubtful about you."

"Then I'll write to her to-day, Martin, and beg her to come at once—as soon as ever she can pack her boxes."

"That's my darling! I hope she won't bore you when she is here. I have a shrewd idea she'll make your life happier. She'll awaken you from that languor which has grown upon you in your loneliness."

"At least I'll try to make her happy, Martin, if it is only for your sake."

"Ah, and you will soon love her for her own sake."

"I'll get the boat looked to at once, and I'll see about making the spare room pretty for her," said Isola.

A week later Allegra was with them, breakfasting on the lawn in the balmy atmosphere of July. There were two girls, in white gowns, under the tulip tree, instead of one; and Martin Disney felt as if his domestic happiness were doubled, as he looked at those two graceful figures in the flickering light below that canopy of broad bright leaves. Another element of comfort, too, had entered the Angler's Nest; for the incompetent cook had taken her incompetency and a month's wages to her native city of Truro; and a buxom damsel from Falmouth, recommended by Tabitha, had already proved herself a treasure in the culinary art.

Never was there a fairer picture than that domestic group under the tulip-tree. The two girlish figures in white muslin, with palest salmon and palest azure ribbons fluttering and glancing in the light and deepening in the

shadow; the white fox-terrier, alert, muscular, mercurial; the tortoise-shell cat, long-haired, aristocratic, and demure; the pretty Moorish plateau on bamboo legs, the purple and crimson breakfast service and rare old silver urn, the fruit and flowers, and amber-hued butter, and rustic luxury of preserved fruit and clotted cream.

"How lovely it all is after Cavendish Road!" cried Allegra, rapturously. "When I see the lights and shadows upon those hills, I despair of ever being able to paint a landscape as long as I live. Nature is maddeningly beautiful."

"What is your particular line, Allegra?" asked her brother. "Is it landscape?"

"No; I only care for landscape as a background for humanity. I want to paint genre pictures in water-colour—women and children—beautiful women amidst beautiful surroundings—picturesque poverty—interesting bits of daily life. Mrs. Allingham is the ideal after which I strive, but I am only at the bottom of the ladder. It is a long climb to the top; but one does not mind that in a profession where labour is delight."

"You are fond of art, then?" said Isola, watching the earnest face of the speaker.

"Fond of it! Why, I live for it! The dream of my life from the time I was seven years old has been one long dream of the bliss that was to be mine when I could feel myself able to paint. I have toiled with all my might. Martin disliked the idea of my being an Academy student—poor, foolish, ignorant Martin—so I have been obliged to plod on at St. John's Wood, without hope of prizes or medals; but on the whole I have been very lucky, for I have made friends among the Academicians. They are very kind to any student who seems in right down earnest; and they have been ever so good to me. I hope, Martin, you will find some day that I am something better than an amateur," she concluded, resting her two hands caressingly upon her brother's shoulder.

"My dearest, I have not the least doubt you will astonish me. I am very ignorant of everything connected with art. I set my face against the Academy because I thought the training and the life would be too public for my sister."

"As if Burlington House were any more public than that big school at St. John's Wood, my dear illogical brother: and yet we women are

the only people who are said to be wanting in the logical faculty."

She leant back in her basket-chair, revelling in the rural atmosphere, and in that new sense of being in the bosom of her family. Tim leapt upon her lap and licked her face, in token of his acceptance of her into the home-circle. Nobody had ever called Miss Leland a beauty, nor had she ever received those disquieting attentions which follow the footsteps of exceptional loveliness. She was sometimes described as a girl who grew upon one; and people who knew her well generally ended by thinking her distractingly pretty. She had a brilliant complexion, of the true English type, fair and blooming—a complexion which indicated perfect health and an active, orderly life; no late hours or novel-reading over the fire—an out-of-door complexion, which would have looked its best under a neat little felt hat in the hunting-field, or under a coquettish straw sailor hat on board a yacht. Her eyes were blue-grey, with long, brown lashes and boldly marked eyebrows; her nose was firmly modelled, inclining a little to the aquiline order. Her mouth was the prettiest

feature in her face, and yet it was a shade larger than accepted perfection in mouths. It was a mouth chiefly remarkable for character and expression; and, indeed, it was the individuality and variety of expression in the fair young face which constituted Miss Leland's chief claim to distinction.

She started up from the nest of basket-work and flowered chintz, and stood tall and erect, a Juno-like young woman, with heavy plaits of reddish-brown hair rolled in a great knot at the back of her head. She might have answered one of those harsh advertisements for parlour-maids, in which the words, "No fringe," figure with curt cruelty; for her hair was brushed smoothly back from the fair forehead, and the severity of the style became that wide sagacious brow. It was just the kind of forehead which can endure exposure without conveying an idea of bald ugliness.

She was tall and strongly made, fashioned after the semblance of Diana or Atalanta rather than Venus or Psyche. Her every movement had the bold, free grace of vigorous, unspoiled youth. She had always been active—fond of

walking, riding, rowing, swimming, as well as of art, and with an ardent passion for the country, which had made existence in a London suburb one long sacrifice.

"I used to take the train for Hampstead Heath or Willesden," she told her brother, "and go off for long, lonely tramps to Finchley or Hendon. I have watched the builder's progress along roads and lanes I loved. I have seen horrid brick boxes creeping along like some new kind of noxious insect, eating up fields and hedgerows, old hawthorns and old hollies. I could have sat down in the muddy road and cried sometimes, at the thought that soon there would be no country walk left within reach of a Londoner. Once I went off to the north-east, to look for the rural lanes Charles Lamb and his sister loved—the lanes and meadows where they carried their little picnic basket, till they took shelter at a homely inn. Oh, Martin, all those fields and lanes, Charles Lamb's country—are going, going, or gone! It is heart-breaking! And they are building at Fowey, too, I see. Positively there will be no country anywhere soon. There will be crescents and terraces and

little ugly streets at the very Land's End, and the Logan Rock will be the sign of a public-house."

"Don't be down-hearted, Chatterbox! I think Cornwall may last our time," said Disney, laughing at her vehemence.

Allegra was a great talker. It seemed as if she had a well-spring of joy and life within her which must find an outlet. When people ventured to hint at her loquacity she declared that her name was in fault.

"I have grown up to match my name," she said; "if I had been christened Penserosa I might have been quite a different person."

Her vivacity gave a new element of brightness to the Angler's Nest, where Disney had been somewhat oppressed by the sensation of intense repose which had pervaded his *tête-à-tête* life with Isola. He loved his wife so entirely, so unselfishly, and devotedly that it was happiness to him to be with her; yet in the three or four weeks that had gone by since his return he had struggled in vain against the feeling that there was something wanting in his home. Isola waited upon him and deferred to him with more

than wifely submissiveness. He would have liked a spurt of rebellion once in a way, a little burst of girlish temper, just to show that she was human; but none ever came. His every desire was anticipated. Whatever plan he suggested—to walk, to drive, to visit, or not to visit—the river or the sea—was always the plan that pleased her best, or at least she said so.

"I think I shall call you Griselda instead of Isola," he said one day, taking the fair pale face between his hands and gazing into the mournful depths of the dark violet eyes—inscrutable eyes they seemed to him, when the pupils dilated under his gaze, as if the eyes made a darkness to hide their meaning.

"Why?" she asked.

A flood of crimson passed over her face like a fire, and left her paler than before.

"Because you are only too dutiful. Would you resist if I were to turn tyrant, I wonder?"

"I have no fear of your turning tyrant," she answered, with a sad little smile, "you are only too good to me."

"Good! There can be no question of goodness. If a man picked up a diamond as precious

as the Koh-i-noor could he be good to it? How can I be good to my gem? I have but one thing left in the world to desire, or to pray for."

"What is that, Martin?"

"To see you happy."

Again the sudden flame crimsoned her face, that sensitive spiritual face which reflected every change of feeling.

"I am happy, Martin, quite happy, happier than I ever thought to be, now that you are home again. What have I more to desire?"

"Is that really so? Was my long absence your greatest trouble?"

"Yes," she answered slowly, looking at him with a curiously steady look, "that was the beginning and end of my trouble."

"Thank God!" he said, drawing a deep breath. "There have been moments—just of late—when I have puzzled and puzzled my brains about you—until I thought—" very slowly, "there might have been something else."

He clasped her in his arms, and hid her face upon his breast, as if—fearing that he might have wounded her by those last words—he wanted to make amends before she had time to

feel his unkindness. His tenderness for her had so much of that pitying love which a strong man feels for a child.

This conversation occurred the day before Allegra's arrival; but with that young lady's appearance on the scene, new life and gladness came into the little household. Allegra sang, Allegra played, Allegra ran out into the garden twenty times a day, and called through the open window to Isola, sitting quietly in the drawing-room, to come out and look at this or that—a rose finer than all other roses—a suggested alteration—an atmospheric effect—anything and everything. She was a keen observer of Nature, full of vivid interest in every creature that lived, and in every flower that grew. Tim followed her everywhere as she danced along the gravel walks, or across the short springy turf. Tim adored her, and grinned at her, and threw himself into all manner of wriggling attitudes upon the grass to express his delight in her company, and fawned at her feet, and talked to her after his guttural fashion, snorting his friendly feelings. Tim had long languished for such a companion, having found his young mistress's

society very heavy of late. No more runs in the meadow, no more rambles in the neighbouring spinney, and very little boating. But now that Allegra had come the skiff was seldom idle. Isola had to go on the river whether she liked or not. There were strong young arms ready to pull her—round young arms, of a lovely roseate fairness, which looked their best, stretched to the motion of the sculls, with the white cambric shirt rolled up above the elbow.

"You can read Shelley while I scull the boat," said Allegra. "I don't want any help. If you knew what rapture it is to me to feel the breath of Seagods and Tritons after St. John's Wood, and the smoke from the Metropolitan Railway, you wouldn't pity me.'

Isola submitted, and sat at her ease upon bright-coloured cushions with an Indian rug spread round her, as idle as if she had been the belle of a Zenana, and read Alastor while the boat sped seaward in the sunshine.

Sometimes they moored their boat at the landing stage at Polruan, and walked up the hill to the Point, and sat there for an hour or two in the summer wind with their books and

picnic basket, seeing great ships go out towards the Lizard and the big distant world, or sail merrily homeward towards Plymouth and the Start. Isola looked at those outward-bound ships with a strange longing in her eyes—a longing to flee away upon those broad wings that flashed whitely in the sunlit distance. Were people happy on board those ships, she wondered, happy at escaping from the fetters of an old life and a beaten path, happy going away to strange lands and freedom? She had been reading many books of travel of late, and a kind of passion for remote uncivilized countries had come upon her; as if that untrammelled life meant release from memory and saddening cares—a new birth almost. It seemed from some of those books as if there could be no greater happiness upon this earth than to tramp across sandy deserts and stalk occasional lions; while in others the supreme good seemed to be found in the attempt to scale impossible mountains. What was it that made the rapture of these things? Isola wondered. Was it that perils and wild solitudes offered the only possible escape out of a past existence, on this side the

grave? Allegra had never so much as crossed the Channel. She had been brought up in the most humdrum fashion. First a school at Falmouth, and then a smarter school at Kensington, and then St. John's Wood and the Art School. Her mother had died when she was fourteen years of age, and since that time her brother had been her only guardian and almost her only friend. Her life had seen but little variety, and very little of the dancing and gaiety which for most girls is the only form of pleasure. She and Isola talked about the ships as they sat upon the grassy hill at Polruan, and speculated about the lands of which they knew only what they had read in books of travel.

"You, at least, know what France is like," said Allegra, "and that is something."

"Only one little corner of France."

"And to think that you were born in an old French city! It seems strange. Do you feel at all French?"

"I don't think so; only sometimes a longing comes upon me to see the old grey walls, and to hear the old voices, and see the curious old women in their white caps and bright-coloured

handkerchiefs, clattering along to the Cathedral. There must be more old women in Brittany than in Cornwall, I think. Fowey does not swarm with old women as Dinan did. And sometimes I long to see mother, and the good old Brittany servants, and the garden where the hours went by so slowly—almost as slowly as they go here" —with a sigh.

"Does time go so very slowly here?" asked Allegra quickly. "That sounds as if you were unhappy."

"What nonsense you talk!" cried Isola, with a flash of sudden anger. "Cannot one be dull and bored sometimes—from very idleness—without being unhappy?"

"I don't know; but, for my own part, when I am happy I am never dull."

"You have more of what people call animal spirits than I have."

"I'm glad you apologize in a manner for that odious phrase—animal spirits. I would not apply such a phrase to Tim. It suggests nothing but Audrey at a statute fair. Heaven gave me a capacity for happiness, and I thank God every night in my prayers for another happy day.

Even at school I contrived to be happy, somehow; and think what it must be after seven years of dull routine to feel that I have done with sitting at a stranger's table and that I am here in a home, my own home, with my brother and sister."

The two women clasped hands, and kissed each other upon this. Only the night before Isola, of her own free will, had asked her sister-in-law to make her home at the Angler's Nest always, always, till she should be led out of it as a bride; and Martin had shown himself supremely happy in the knowledge that his sister had won his wife's love and confidence.

When Isola and he were alone together after the sealing of that family bond, he kissed and thanked her for this boon which she had bestowed upon him.

"I never could have felt quite at ease while Allegra was living with strangers," he told her. "And now my cup is full. But are you sure, dearest, that you will never find her in the way, never fancy yourself any the less mistress of your house, and of my life, because she is here?"

"Never, never, never! I am gladder than I

can say to have her. She is a delightful companion. She helps me in a hundred ways. But even if she were less charming it would be my duty to have her here since you like her to be with us."

"But it must not be done as a duty. I will not have you sacrifice your inclination in the slightest degree."

"What an obtuse person you are! Don't I tell you that I am enchanted to have her? She is as much my sister as ever Gwendoline was; indeed, she is much more sympathetic than Gwen ever was."

"Then I am perfectly content."

Allegra wrote to Mrs. Meynell next day, announcing the decision that had been arrived at, not without grateful acknowledgments of that lady's kindness. The rest of her belongings were to be sent to her forthwith, easels, and colour-boxes, books and knickknacks; her brother's gifts, most of them from the romantic East; things which made her few little Kensingtonian keepsakes look very trivial and Philistine. Allegra's possessions gave a new individuality to the large, airy bedroom, and the tiny boudoir at the corner

of the house, looking seaward, which Isola had arranged for her.

While these things were doing Martin Disney was buying horses and buying land—a farm of over two hundred acres which would make his property better worth holding—and he had further employed a Plymouth architect to plan an enlargement of the old-fashioned cottage—a long room opening out of the drawing-room, for a library and morning-room, two bedrooms over, a verandah below, and a loggia above. In that mild climate the loggia would afford a pleasant lounge even in winter, and myrtle and roses would speedily cover the massive wooden columns which sustained the tiled roof. It was to be a homely Italian loggia—unpretentious, and not particularly architectural; but Isola and her sister-in-law were delighted at the idea.

The stables were to be enlarged as well as the house.

"You have no idea how I have hoarded and scraped to lay by money ever since I bought the Nest," said Disney. "I believe I was the greatest screw in the service all through my last campaign."

He laughed aloud in amused remembrance of many small sacrifices, while the three heads clustered over the architect's plan, which had that factitious prettiness of delicate drawing and colour which makes every house so much nearer perfection upon paper than it ever can be in sober brick and stone.

CHAPTER IX.

"LIES NOTHING BURIED LONG AGO?"

LIKE most small country settlements, little fraternities of well-to-do people who think themselves the beginning and end of the world, Trelasco was slow to rise to any festivity in the way of party-giving. So it was about two months after Colonel Disney's return before the friendly calls and interchange of small civilities culminated in a dinner-party at Glenaveril. It seemed, indeed, only right and natural that the great house of the district, great by reason of Lord Lostwithiel's non-residence, should be the first to open its doors in a ceremonial manner to the colonel and his womankind. The invitation to his sister might be taken as an especial compliment, arms outstretched to receive one who was a stranger in the land.

"We want to know that nice, young sister of

yours," Mr. Crowther said to Colonel Disney, in his patronizing way, as they all came out of church the Sunday before the dinner-party. "A remarkably fine girl."

The colonel did not thank him for this compliment, which was pronounced in a loud voice, amidst the little knot of acquaintances taking leave of each other on the dip of the hill, where there was a sign-post on a patch of waste grass, and where road and lanes divided, one up the hill to Tywardreath, another to Fowey, and a narrow-wooded lane leading down to Glenaveril and the Angler's Nest. Short as the distance was, there were carriages waiting for the Crowthers, who never walked to church, however fine the weather. Mrs. Crowther came to the morning service resplendent in a brocade gown and a Parisian bonnet, on pain of being condemned as dowdy by her husband, who liked to put the stamp of his wealth upon every detail. His wife obeyed him with wifely meekness, but the daughters were not so easily ruled. Both were keen-witted enough to feel the vulgarity of Sunday morning splendour. So Belinda worshipped in the exaggerated simplicity of an

unstarched jaconet muslin, a yellow Liberty sash, a flopping Gainsborough hat, and a necklace of Indian beads, an attire which attracted every eye, and was a source of wonder to the whole congregation, while Alicia's neat grey cashmere frock, made by the best tailor in Conduit Street, and smart little toque to match, grey gloves, grey Prayer-book and sunshade, challenged criticism as a study in monochrome.

Mr. Crowther would have lingered for further conversation before getting into the family landau, but Colonel Disney bade a rather abrupt good morning to the whole group, and hurried his wife and sister down the hill.

"I'm rather sorry we accepted the Glenaveril invitation," he said to Isola. "The man is such an obvious cad."

"Mrs. Crowther is very kind and good," replied his wife; "but I have never cared much about going to Glenaveril. I don't feel that I get on particularly well with the girls. They are both too fine for me. But I should be sorry to offend Mrs. Crowther."

"Yes, she seems a kindly creature. It was thoughtful of her sending you a ticket for the

ball. A woman with daughters is seldom over-kind to outsiders."

"Oh, I believe Mrs. Crowther's heart is big enough to be kind to a whole parish."

"Well, on her account, perhaps it was best to accept the invitation."

"Don't be so grand about it, Martin," said Allegra. "You forget that I am pining to see what a dinner-party in a very rich house is like. I have seen nothing in London but literary and artistic dinners, third-rate literary and third-rate artistic, I'm afraid—but they were very nice, all the same. Glenaveril is a place that takes my breath away; and I am curious to see what a dinner-party can be like there."

"Then for your sake, Allegra, I'm glad we said yes. Only I couldn't stand that fellow patronizing you. Calling you a fine girl, forsooth!"

"Yes, it is an odious phrase, is it not? I'm afraid I shall have to live through it, because, like Rosalind, 'I am more than common tall.'"

She drew herself up to her full height, straight as a reed, but with fully developed bust and shoulders which showed to advantage in her pale

tussore gown—silk that her brother had sent her from India. She looked the incarnation of girlish innocence and girlish happiness—a brow without a cloud, a step light as a fawn's—a fearless, happy nature. Her more commonplace features and finer figure were in curious contrast with Isola's pensive beauty and too fragile form. Disney glanced from one to the other as he walked along the rustic lane between them; and, though he thought his wife the lovelier, he regretted that she was not more like his sister.

A man who is very fond of home and who has no professional cares and occupations is apt to degenerate into a molly-coddle. Martin Disney gave an indication of this weakness on the day before the dinner at Glenaveril.

"What are you two girls going to wear?" he asked. "At least, I don't think I need ask Isola that question. You'll wear your wedding-gown, of course, love?" he added, turning to his wife.

"No, Martin, I am going to wear my grey silk."

"Grey! A dowager's colour, a soured spinster's colour—a Quaker's no colour. I detest grey."

"Oh, but this is a very pretty gown—the palest shade of pearl colour—and I wear pink roses with it. It was made in Paris. I feel sure you will like me in it, Martin," Isola said hurriedly, as if even this small matter fluttered her nerves.

"Not as well as I like you in your wedding-gown. That was made in Paris, and it fitted you like a glove. I never saw such a pretty gown—so simple, yet so elegant."

"I have been married much too long to dress as a bride."

"You shall not seem as a bride—except to me. For my eyes only shall you shine in bridal loveliness. Bride or no bride, what can be prettier for a young woman than a white satin gown with a long train. You can wear some touch of colour to show you have not got yourself up as a bride. What do you say, Allegra? Give us your opinion. Of course you are an authority upon dress."

"Oh, the white satin, by all means. Isola looks ethereal in white. She ought hardly ever to wear anything else."

"You hear, Isa. Two to one against you."

"I'm sorry I can't be governed by your opinions in this instance. You forget that I last wore my gown at a ball. I danced a good deal—the floor was dirty—the gown was spoilt. I shall never wear it again. I hope that will satisfy you, Martin."

She spoke with a touch of temper, her cheeks flushed crimson, and her eyes filled with sudden tears as she looked deprecatingly at her husband. Martin Disney felt himself a brute.

"My dearest, I didn't mean to tease you," he said; "wear anything you like. You are sure to be the prettiest woman in the room. I am sorry the gown was spoilt; but it can't be helped. I'll buy you another white satin gown the first time you and I are in Plymouth together. And, pray, Miss Allegra, what bravery will you sport?"

"I have only a white lace frock that has seen some service," replied his sister, meekly. "I dare say I shall look like somebody's poor relation at such a place as Glenaveril."

"Oh, it's not to be a grand party, by any means. Mrs. Crowther told me she had asked the Baynhams and the Vicarage people to meet us, just in a friendly way."

The party was decidedly small, for on arriving with reasonable punctuality the Disneys found only one guest on the scene, in the person of Mr. Colfox, the curate, who was sitting by one of the little artistic tables, showing a new puzzle of two pieces of interlinked iron to the two Misses Crowther. These young ladies were so intensely interested in the trick of disentanglement that they scarcely noticed the entrance of their mother's guests, and only rose and came over to greet the party three minutes later, as an afterthought.

Mr. and Mrs. Crowther, however, were both upon the alert to receive their friends, the lady frankly cordial, the gentleman swelling with pompous friendliness, as if his manly breast were trying to emerge from the moderate restriction of a very open heart-shaped waistcoat. He protested that he was charmed to welcome Colonel Disney to Glenaveril, and he glanced round the splendid walls as who should say, "It is no light thing to invite people to such a house as this."

Vansittart Crowther was a man of short, squat figure, who tried to make up for the want of

inches by extreme uprightness, and had cultivated this carriage until he seemed incapable of bending. He had a bald head, disguised by one dappled streak of grey and sandy hair, which was plastered into a curl on each side of his brow—curls faintly suggestive of a cat's ears. He had blunt features, a sensual lip, and dull, fishy eyes, large and protuberant, with an expression in perfect harmony with the heavy, sensual mouth.

Mr. and Mrs. Baynham were the next arrivals; the lady wearing the family amethysts and the well-known black velvet, under whose weighty splendour she arrived short of breath; the gentleman expansive of shirt front, and genial of aspect, jovial at the prospect of a good dinner and choice wines, and not hypercritical as to the company in which he ate the feast. He shook hands with his host and hostess, and then went over to the Misses Crowther, who had not thought it necessary to suspend their absorbing occupation in order to welcome the village doctor's wife—a fact which Mrs. Baynham observed and inwardly resented.

Mr. Colfox deserted the young ladies, still

puzzling over the two bits of iron, and went across the room to greet the Disneys. He was an intelligent young man, steeped to the lips in the opinions and the prejudices of university life—Oxford life, that is to say. He ranked as a literary man in Trelasco, on the strength of having had an article almost published in Blackwood. "The editor had accepted my paper," he told people modestly; "but on further consideration he found it was a little too long, and so, in point of fact, he sent it back to me in the most courteous manner. He couldn't have acted more kindly—but I was disappointed. It would have been such an opening, you see."

All Mr. Colfox's friends agreed that with such an opening the high road to literary fame and fortune would have been made smooth for his feet. They respected him even for this disappointment. To have been accepted by Blackwood made him almost a colleague of George Eliot.

He was a tall and rather lean young man, who wore an eye-glass, and seemed to live upon books. It was irritating to Vansittart Crowther, who prided himself on his cellar and his cook,

to note how little impression food and drink made upon Francis Colfox.

"He takes my Château Yquem as if it were Devonshire cider," said the aggrieved parvenu, "and he hardly seems to know that this is the only house where he ever sees clear turtle. The man's people must have lived in a very poor way."

In spite of this contemptuous opinion, Mr. Crowther was always polite to Francis Colfox, and had even thought of him as a *pis-aller* for one of his daughters. There is hardly anything in this life which a self-made man respects so much as race, and Francis Colfox belonged to an old county family, had a cousin who was an earl, and another cousin who was talked of as a probable bishop. He was, therefore, allowed to make himself very much at home at Glenaveril, and to speak his mind in a somewhat audacious way to the whole family.

Captain Pentreath, an army man of uncertain age, a bachelor, and one of a territorial family of many brothers, came next; and then appeared the vicar and his wife and one daughter, who made up the party. The vicar was deaf, but

amiable, and beamed benevolently upon a world about whose spoken opinions he knew so little that he might naturally have taken it for a much better world than it is. The vicar's wife spent her existence in interpreting and explaining people's speech to the vicar, and had no time to spare for opinions of her own. The daughter was characterized by a gentle nullity, tempered by a somewhat enthusiastic and evangelical piety. The chief desire of her life was to keep the Church as it had been in the days of her childhood, nearly thirty years before.

It was the first time the Disneys had dined together at Glenaveril, so it seemed only proper that Mr. Crowther should give his arm to Isola, which he did with an air of conferring an honour. The colonel had been ordered to take the vicar's wife, and the doctor was given to Allegra; Captain Pentreath took Miss Trequite, the vicar's daughter; Mr. Colfox followed with Mrs. Baynham, and the daughters of the house went modestly to the dining-room after the vicar and Mrs. Crowther.

The dinner-table was as pretty as roses and Venetian glass could make it. There was no

pompous display of ponderous plate, as there might have been thirty years ago on a parvenu's board. Everybody is enlightened nowadays. The great "culture" movement has been as widespread among the middle class as compulsory education among the proletariat, and everybody has "a taste." Scarcely were they seated, when Mr. Crowther informed Mrs. Disney that he hated a display of silver, but at the same time took care to let her know that the Venetian glass she admired was rather more valuable than that precious metal. "And if it's broken, there's nothing left you for your outlay," he said; "but it's a fancy of my wife and girls. Those decanters are better than anything Salviati ever made for Royalty."

The table was oval, lighted by one large lamp, under an umbrella-shaped amber shade, a lamp which diffused a faint golden glow through the dusky room; and through this dreamy dimness the footmen moved like ghosts, while the table and the faces of the diners shone and sparkled in the brilliant light. It was as picturesque a dining-room and table as one need care to see; and if the Gainsboroughs and Reynoldses, which

here and there relieved the sombre russet of the Cordovan leather hangings, were not the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Crowther's ancestors, they were not the less lovely or interesting as works of art.

Isola sat by her host's side, with a silent and somewhat embarrassed air, which her husband noted as he watched her from the other side of the table.

All the decorations were low, so that no pyramid of fruit or flowers intervened to prevent a man watching the face opposite to him. Disney saw that while Allegra, in her place between Mr. Baynham and Alicia Crowther, was full of talk and animation, Isola sat with downcast eyes, and replied with a troubled look to her host's remarks. There was something in that gentleman's manner which was particularly obnoxious to the colonel—a protecting air, a fatherly familiarity, which brought the bald, shining forehead almost in contact with Isola's shoulder.

As the man bent to whisper and to titter in the very ear of his neighbour, the colonel got through a little duty talk with Mrs. Trequite, whose attention was frequently distracted by the necessity of explaining Mrs. Crowther's polite

murmurs to the vicar on the other side of the table; and this duty done he gave himself up to watching Isola and her host. Why did she blush so when the man talked to her? Was it the bold admiration of those fishy eyes which annoyed her, or the man's manner altogether; or was it anything that he said? Disney strained his ears to hear their conversation, if that could be called conversation which was for the most part monologue.

The man was talking of the Hunt Ball of last winter. Disney heard such snatches of speech as "the prettiest woman in the room," "everybody said so," "Lostwithiel was evidently *épris*."

Mr. Crowther had a penchant for scraps of French, which decorated his speech as truffles adorn a boned turkey.

"Isn't it odd that he should be such a rover?" he asked, in a less confidential tone than before.

Isola looked up at him, as if hardly understanding the question.

"I mean Lostwithiel. With such a nice place as he has here, it seems a pity to be broiling himself in Peru. I never could understand the taste for orchids; and in his case—well, I hardly

believe in it. He is the last man to emulate a Hooker or a Lawrence. Orchid-hunting must be an excuse for keeping away from England, I take it. Don't you think so, now, Mrs. Disney?"

"I really don't know."

"You don't know why he should want to keep away? No, no more does anybody else. Only we all wonder, don't you know. He talked to me of settling down in the county—looking after the estate a little. He even hinted that he might, in due course, cast about for a nice young wife—with a little money. And then all of a sudden off he sails in that rakish yacht of his, and roves from port to port like the Flying Dutchman in the Opera, till at last we hear of him on the coast of Peru. Curious, ain't it, Mrs. Disney?"

"Why curious?" asked Isola, coldly. "Was not Lord Lostwithiel always fond of yachting?"

"No doubt; but when a man talks of settling down in his native place—and then doesn't do it—there must be a reason, mustn't there?"

"I don't know. People act as often from caprice as from reason."

"Ah, that is a lady's idea. No man who is worthy the name ever acts from caprice," said Mr. Crowther, with his insinuating air, as if some hidden meaning were in the words, and then looking across the table and seeing the colonel's watchful face, he altered both tone and manner as he added, "Of course you know Lostwithiel, Colonel Disney?"

"I saw a good deal of Lord Lostwithiel when he was a small boy," answered the colonel, coldly. "His father was one of my early friends. But that is a long time ago."

"How old is he, do you say?"

'Debrett will answer that question better than I can. I have never reckoned the years that have gone by since I saw him in an Eton collar."

The men did not sit long over their wine. The doctor and his host talked agriculture, Mr. Crowther discussing all farming operations upon a large scale as became a man of territorial magnitude. The vicar prosed about an approaching lecture at the schoolroom, and utterly failed in hearing anything that was said in reply to his observations. Colonel Disney smoked a cigarette in silence, and with a moody brow.

Later, in the drawing-room, while the Crowther girls were playing a clamorous duet, by the last fashionable Sclavonic composer, Vansittart Crowther directed his conversation almost wholly to Mrs. Disney, as if she were the only person worthy of his attention. He was full of suggestions for future gaieties in which the Disneys were to share—picnics, boating parties.

"You must help us to wake up the neighbourhood, colonel," he said, addressing Disney, with easy friendliness.

"We are not very likely to be of much assistance to you in that line," Disney answered coldly. "We are quiet stay-at-home people, my wife and I, and take our pleasures on a very small scale."

Colonel Disney's carriage was announced at this moment. He gave his wife a look which plainly indicated his wish to depart, and she rose quickly from the low, deep chair in which she had been sitting, in some manner a captive, while Mr. Crowther lolled across the broad, plush-cushioned arm to talk to her. Allegra was engrossed in a talk about William Morris's last poem with Mr. Colfox, who was delighted to

converse with any one fresh from the far-away world of art and literature—delighted altogether with Allegra, whose whole being presented a piquant contrast to the Miss Crowthers. But the colonel's sister saw the movement towards departure, and hastened to her brother's side. Briefest adieux followed, and the first of the guests being gone, left behind them a feeling of uneasiness in those whose carriages had been ordered half an hour later. One premature departure will cast a blight upon your small dull party; whereas from a scene of real mirth the nine Muses and three Graces might all slip away unmissed and unobserved.

CHAPTER X.

"OF THE WEAK MY HEART IS WEAKEST."

"You had better send cards to Mrs. Crowther, Isola," said Martin Disney, two days afterwards, when his wife was sitting at her Davenport writing her family letters.

"Cards! Oh, Martin, she would think that so very formal. I can call upon her. She is always at home on Thursday afternoons, and she likes to go."

"I am sorry for that, since I had rather you should never enter her house again."

"Martin!"

"I have nothing to say against Mrs. Crowther, my dear Isola. But the man is more detestable than I could have believed low birth and unlimited money could make any man. Guileless and inexperienced as you are, I think you must

have felt that his manner to you the other night was familiar to the point of being insulting."

Isola had felt both embarrassed and distressed by her host's attentions—the insinuating inflections of his fat, pompous voice; his air of being upon a confidential footing with her. It had seemed to her on that evening as if for the first time in her life, before the eyes of men and women, she drank the cup of shame. She had said no word to her husband of Mr. Crowther's oppressive familiarity, and she had fondly hoped that the matter had escaped his notice.

She sat before him now, flushed and agitated, with lowered eyelids, and one hand restlessly moving about the papers on her blotting-pad.

"My dearest, there is nothing in all this to distress you," said Disney, with infinite gentleness. "It is not your fault that the man is a cad; but it would be my fault if I were to allow you or Allegra to go to his house again."

"He was not rude to Allegra."

"No; it would be her turn next, perhaps. He did not mean to be rude to you. He only wanted to be especially polite in his own odious fashion. There are men in that class who cannot behave

decently to a pretty woman, or civilly to a plain one. He meant no doubt to gratify you by his compliments. What a stress he laid upon Lostwithiel's attention to you at the ball. Were his attentions so very marked?"

"Oh no; not more to me than to others," Isola answered quickly. "He danced a good many times—twice or three times—with Belinda Crowther. Everybody noticed them as the handsomest couple in the room; not that he is handsome, of course—only tall and distinguished-looking."

Allegra came running in from the lawn, and broke the thread of the conversation. Isola put the three visiting-cards into an envelope and addressed it to Mrs. Vansittart Crowther. She felt that the kindly matron would be puzzled and vexed at this ceremony, from a young person towards whom she had assumed so motherly a tone, urging her to run over to Glenaveril at any hour of the day—asking her to lunch or to tea at least once a week—wanting to take her for drives to Lostwithiel, or railway jaunts to Plymouth.

Isola was not mistaken, for Mrs. Crowther

called three or four days afterwards and upbraided her for sending the cards.

"You might have all come to tea on Th ursday, if you had been good-natured," she said. "Mr. Colfox read us a poem by Swinburne, out of one of the new magazines—there are so many nowadays that I never remember which is which. Belinda was delighted with it—but Alicia and I can't rise to her height. Mr. Colfox reads poetry beautifully. You can't judge of his powers by only hearing him read the lessons," added Mrs. Crowther, as if the English Bible were a poor thing.

She stopped an hour, praised Isola's tea-making and the new cook's tea-cakes, asked a great many questions about Allegra's ideas and occupations, and was as hearty, and simple, and friendly, and natural as if she had been a duchess.

It grieved Isola to be obliged to refuse an invitation to luncheon, most cordially pressed upon her and Allegra.

"I would drive you both to Lostwithiel after lunch, and we could do our little bit of shopping and then have a cup of tea at the Talbot while

the horses had their mouths washed out, and I'd show you the room where your brother's wife was so much admired last year, Miss Leland, and where I hope you'll have many a good dance next winter. Now the ice is broken we mean to go on with our balls, I can tell you. Indeed, my girls are thinking of trying to get up a tennis-club ball about the end of September."

This was the last time Mrs. Vansittart Crowther appeared in a friendly manner at the Angler's Nest, for after two or three further invitations—to a picnic—to tea—to lunch—had been declined, in most gracious little notes from Isola, that good lady perceived that there was some kind of barrier to friendly intercourse between her and Colonel Disney's wife, and she told herself with some touch of honest middle-class dignity that if Martin Disney was proud she could be proud too, and that she would make no further offer of friendship which was undesired.

"I suppose he thinks because he comes of a good old family, while we have made our money in trade, that we are not quite good enough to associate with his wife and sister," she said to her daughters. "I thought he was

too much of a gentleman to have such a petty feeling."

"How innocent you are, mother," cried Alicia, contemptuously; "can't you see that they are all bursting with envy? That was what made the colonel so gloomy and disagreeable the night of our little dinner. He was vexed to see things done with as good taste as in a nobleman's house. It cuts these poor gentilities to the quick to see that. They don't much mind our being rich, if we will only be vulgar and uneducated. But when we have the impertinence to be as well up in the ways of good society as they are themselves, they can't forgive us. Good taste in a parvenu is the unforgivable sin."

"Well, I don't know," mused Mrs. Crowther, sadly. "I'm sure there's neither pride nor envy in Isola, and Miss Leland looks a frank, straightforward girl, above all foolish nonsense; so it must be the colonel's fault that they've cut us."

"Cut us!" echoed Belinda; "the Angler's Nest cutting Glenaveril is rather too absurd an idea."

"My dear, you don't know the importance Cornish people attach to old family—and the

Disneys are a very old family—and no one can deny that he is a gentleman, though we don't like him."

"Oh, no doubt he considers that he belongs to the landed gentry. He has bought Rowe's farm, two hundred and sixty acres. He had forty to begin with, so he is now lord of three hundred acres, just half our home farm."

"His cousin, Sir Luke Disney, has a large estate near Marazion," said Mrs. Crowther, meekly.

"Yes, but we don't reckon a man's importance by his cousin's estate. Colonel Disney is only a squatter in this part of the country."

Alicia pronounced the word with gusto. It had been whispered to her that the squire of Fowey had spoken of her father—who counted his acres by thousands—as a squatter. That unimpeachable importance, founded upon the established respectability of bygone centuries—centuries in which men wore armour and women breakfasted on beef and ale—was not to be bought with gold and silver, and the want of it often made the Miss Crowthers angry. Diamonds they could have, and land, art, and beauty,

even the ways and manners of good society, but they could not buy themselves a history. Everybody knew that their splendours had all come out of a cloth mill, that their ingots had been in some part transmuted from pestiferous woollen rags gathered in the Jewish quarters of far-off cities, ground into shoddy, and anon issued to the world as sleek superfine cloth. The more shoddy the higher interest upon capital; and Vansittart Crowther's daughters knew too many of the secrets of the mills to be proud of the source of their prosperity.

Mrs. Crowther was sorry to lose Isola as a friend and *protégée*. Her daughters were furious at the slight implied in this gradual dropping away. They passed Mrs. Disney and her sister-in-law with their noses in the air, as they went from the church-porch to their carriage. They cut them ostentatiously if they met on the quiet country roads. Mrs. Crowther would still stop to speak and shake hands, albeit she urged no further invitations.

And while the gulf widened between the great house and the small one the glorious Cornish summer waned, and slowly, slowly, melted away,

lingering very late in that fair western land, which was full of flowers even when the home counties were being withered and blackened by the first frosts. At last came winter, and the gradual turn of the year; short days slowly lengthening out by leisurely sunsets; pale snowdrops glimmering in the borders; and then the gold of crocuses and the bright blue of the Siberian bell-flower in patches of vivid colour; and then hyacinths and tulips, primroses on every bank, narcissus and jonquil in every garden; and by-and-by the full glory of bluebell and hawthorn blossom. And anon in the middle of May came an event in which all the interests of Colonel Disney's life seemed to culminate. In that balmy Maytime Isola's firstborn son came into the world, and Isola's young life hovered at the gate of death, in so terrible an uncertainty that Martin Disney's hair grew grey while he awaited the issue of the contest between youth and weakness.

For more than a week after the birth of her baby Isola's condition had satisfied the trained nurse and the kindly doctor. She was very white and weak, and she showed less interest

in her baby than most young mothers—a fact which Mr. Baynham ascribed to over-education.

"The young women of the present day aren't half such good mothers as those I used to attend when I began practice," he said discontentedly. "Their heads are stuffed with poetry, and such like. They're nervous and fanciful—and the upshot of it all is that babies have to be wet-nursed or brought up by hand. If I had the making of a New Republic I wouldn't allow any married woman the run of a library until she had reared the last of her babies. What does a young married woman want with book-learning? She ought to have enough to do to look after her husband and her nursery."

Before the baby son was a fortnight old, fever supervened, and Isola's state gave poor Mr. Baynham the deepest alarm. A hospital nurse was sent for to assist the established custodian; and a great authority was brought over from Plymouth to approve the village doctor's treatment, and to make a trifling alteration in a prescription, substituting bromide of sodium for bromide of potassium.

Many days and nights of delirium followed the

physician's visit, a period in which the patient was watched at every hour of the day and night; and one of the most constant watchers through all that dreary time was Martin Disney. It was in vain that Allegra and the nurses urged him to consider his own health. He would consent only to leave the sick-room for briefest intervals of rest. Day after day, night after night, he sat in the same chair—an old-fashioned armchair, with projecting sides, which almost hid him from the patient—beside the bed. He was never in the way of the nurse. He was always helpful when a man's help was needed. He was so quiet that it was impossible to object to his presence. He sat there like a statue of patience. No moan escaped his pallid lips; no tear stole down his haggard cheek. He sat and watched and waited for the issue, which was to make him happy, or desolate for ever.

All his future was involved in that issue. He looked with a faint smile upon the pink little baby face, when they brought his son to him. No one would have dared to suggest that he should take care of himself and be comforted for that little one's sake. They all knew that

his firstborn was as nothing to him. All his love and care, all his hopes and his fears were centred in the wife who lay upon yonder bed, with glassy eyes and babbling lips, a wanderer in a shadowy world full of torturing images—fountains of bubbling water which she longed to drink—great black serpents, which came crawling in at the window, and creeping nearer, nearer to her bed—wriggling, hideous forms that hemmed her in on every side—giant staircases that she was always trying to climb—mammoth caves in which she lost herself, fifty times bigger and more awful than those serpentine caverns near the Lizard, which she and Allegra had explored in the previous autumn—steeper, stonier than the tall cliffs and pinnacled rocks above Bedruthan sands.

Day after day, night after night, Martin Disney sat in his place and listened to those ravings of a mind distraught. He could not keep himself from trying to follow her in that labyrinth of disconnected fancies—visions of shapeless horror, trouble, confusion—a wild babbling of numbers, prattling of millions, billions, trillions—as if her days of health and sense had been spent in the

calculations of a Rothschild, she who could scarcely reckon the simplest account in a tradesman's book.

What had she to do with this torturing recital of thousands and millions, this everlasting heaping up of figures?

Then at another period of that long struggle between life and death, reason and unreason, she had a ghastly vision of two children, squatting on each side of her bed, one living, the other dead, a grisly child with throat cut from ear to ear. Again and again she conjured them to take away those babies—the dead child whose horrid aspect froze her blood—the living child which grinned and made faces at her.

Once and once only during that season of delirium the elder of her nurses carried the baby to her bedside, the tiny and delicate form in snowy cambric and lace, a little roseate face, on which the first glimmer of intelligence was already dawning, sweet blue eyes that smiled at the light, rosebud lips that invited kisses. The nurse took the infant to the side of the bed, and asked the young mother to look at him. Those fever-bright eyes stared at the

sweet small face with a gaze of ever-growing horror, and then with a wild shriek Isola clasped her hands before her eyes, and drew herself cowering to the further side of the bed.

"The dead child!" she cried. "Why do you show me that dead child? Don't you see his throat streaming with blood?"

It was a case in which the nurses had no easy duty by day or night; and there were times when Disney insisted that the night-nurse should have extra rest, while he kept guard.

"But if she should be very bad, sir, you might not be able to manage."

"Oh yes, I should. My sister is a very light sleeper. She would come to me in a moment, and she has a great deal of influence with my wife."

This was true. From the beginning of evil Allegra's presence had exercised a soothing power. She had been able to lull the patient to sleep sometimes, when opiates had failed to produce even fitful slumber. Isola was calmer and less restless when her sister-in-law was by her side.

In those long night watches, sometimes in

solitude, Martin Disney had ample leisure in which to ponder upon his wedded life, and to consider how far the hopes with which he had entered upon that life had been realized. The retrospect left him melancholy, and with a latent sense of loss and disappointment; and yet he told himself again and again that he did ill to be dissatisfied, that Providence had dealt kindly with him.

At five and forty years of age, he, Martin Disney, of modest fortune and social status, and of no especial claim to be admired, intellectual or physical, had won the hand of a lovely and interesting girl. He had been so bewildered and overcome by the delight of his conquest, that he had entered upon no laborious process of self-examination before he took to himself this fair and winning partner. It had been enough for him that she came to him willingly, lovingly, in all truth and girlish simplicity, loyal as she was pure. He had never asked himself could such an attachment last—on her side? It had been enough for him that the love existed. It would be his duty and his delight to strengthen the bond, to draw that fair spirit into closer union

with his own. He had felt no shadow of fear for the future. Once having won her, it must be easy to keep his treasure—easy for him who would so faithfully guard and cherish this priceless gift of a benign Providence. He was a man of deep religious feeling—a man who recognized in good and evil, in joy and in sorrow, the dealings of an Almighty God with His short-sighted creatures. He accepted Isola's love as the crowning blessing of his life — accepted it in fear and trembling, knowing the instability of all mortal joys; but he had never feared the loss of her love.

Yet now, sitting in the deep of night beside that bed which might be the bed of death, he told himself that his wife's love was lost to him, had been lost from the hour of his return to Trelasco, when he went back to her with all the enthusiasm of a lover, forgetful of his mature years, of his long experience of life—hard fighting, hard knocks of all kinds in the great life-battle.

He had gone back to her as Leander to Hero, a boy in heart and hopefulness; and what had he found in her? A placid, obedient wife, gentle

almost to apathy, but with a strain of melancholy underlying all their relations which his devoted love could not conquer.

To all his interrogations her answer had been the same. She was not unhappy. She had everything in life that she desired. There was nothing that he could give her, no change in their existence which could be brought about that would add to her content. All this should mean domestic peace, a heart at ease; yet all this was unsatisfying to Martin Disney; for his instinct told him that his wife was not happy—that the element of gladness was, for some inscrutable reason, banished from her life.

She had seemed happier, or at least the little home had been brighter and gayer after Allegra's coming; but as the time wore on it became clear to him that the life and gaiety were all in Allegra herself, and that Isola was spiritless and depressed. It was as if the spring of her life had snapped suddenly, and left her nerveless and joyless, a submissive, unhopeful creature. That sense of disappointment and loss which he had dimly felt, even when his home-coming had been a new thing, had grown and deepened with the

passage of time. He had bought his land; he had added to the space and comfort of his house; he had enlarged the stables, and bought a couple of hunters, and a cob for harness; and while these things had been doing, the activity of his days, the pleasant fuss and labour of arrangement and supervision, had occupied his mind so pleasantly as to stifle those growing doubts for the time being. But when all was done; when the vine and the figtree had been planted, and he sat down to take his ease in their shelter, then he began to feel very keenly that his wife's part in all that he had done was the part of submission only. She liked this or that because he liked it. She was content, and that was all. And the line between contentment and resignation is so faint a demarcation that it seemed to him sometimes as if she were only resigned, as if she suffered life rather than lived—suffered life as holy women suffer some slow, wasting disease, in meek subjection to a mysterious decree.

He sat beside her bed, while she battled with all the demons of delirium; and he wondered whether, when she had been at her best; when her mind had been brightest and clearest—

whether she had been any nearer to him than she was now in her madness; whether he had known any more of her inner self—the mystery of her heart and conscience—than he knew now, while those wild eyes stared at him without sight or knowledge.

One summer morning, as he sat alone in his watch in that dull interval between darkness and dawn, the visions of the wandering mind took a more consecutive form than usual. She fancied herself in a storm at sea. The waves were rolling mountains high—were bearing down upon her with threatenings of instant death. She feared, and yet she courted them. In one minute she was recoiling from the wild rush of waters, clinging distractedly to the brass rail at the head of her bed, crouching against the wall as if to save herself from an advancing wave; and in the next minute she sprang out of bed, and rushed to the open window, wanting to throw herself out of it. Disney was only just quick enough to seize her in his arms, and carry her back to bed. He held her there, battling with him in a vehement effort to escape from his restraining arms.

"Why do you stop me?" she cried, looking

at him fiercely with her distracted eyes. "What else is there for me? What other refuge? what other hope? Let me go! let me go! Cruel! cruel! cruel! Let me throw myself into the sea! Don't you understand? Oh, cruel! cruel! Cold and wicked, shameless and cruel! There is nothing else—only that refuge left! Let me hide myself in death! let me hide—hide!"

Her voice rose to a shriek; and both the nurse and Allegra came rushing in. The faint white dawn shone upon her livid face and on the scarlet spot upon each hollow cheek; her eyes stared wildly, starting from their sockets in that paroxysm of her madness.

Only a few days after that night of terror Isola was lying calm as a child. The fever had gone down—the enfeebled constitution had at last answered to the influence of medicine; and gradually, like the slow lifting of the darkness after a long night of cloud and fog, consciousness and reason came back. Sleep soothed the strained and weary nerves, and the exhausted frame, which a few days before had seemed endowed with a superhuman strength, lay like a log upon the bed of sickness.

Recovery was slow, but there was no relapse. Slow as the dawning of day to the tired watcher, after the long, blank night, there came the dawn of maternal love. The young mother began to take delight in her child; and it was rapture to Martin Disney to see her sitting opposite him under the tulip-tree, in the low Madeira chair, with her baby in her lap. Allegra vied with her in her devotion to that over-praised infant; while the Shah and Tim, of the same opinion for the first time in their lives, were almost rabid with jealousy.

They all lived in the garden in that happy summer season, as they had done the year before, when Allegra first came among them. It was in the garden they received their visitors, and it was there that Mr. Colfox came at least thrice a week, upon the flimsiest pretexts of parish business, to drink tea poured out for him by Allegra's helpful hands, while Isola sat quietly by, listening to their talk, with her baby lying in her lap.

Allegra had taken kindly to parish work, and, in Mr. Colfox's own phraseology, was a tower of strength to him in his labours among the poor

of Trelasco. She had started a series of mothers' meetings in the winter afternoons, and had read to the women and girls while they worked, helping them a good deal with their work into the bargain. She had done wonders at penny readings, singing, reciting, drawing lightning caricatures of local celebrities with a bit of chalk upon a black-board. Her portrait of Vansittart Crowther had been applauded to the echo, although it was not a flattering portrait. She had visited the sick; she had taught in the night school. The curate had been enthusiastic in his appreciation of her, and his praises had been listened to contemptuously by the two Miss Crowthers, each of whom at different periods had taken up these good works, only to drop them again after the briefest effort.

"She will get tired as soon as we did," said Alicia, "when she finds out how impossible these creatures are—unless she has an ulterior motive."

"What ulterior motive should she have?" asked Colfox, bluntly.

"Who can tell? She may want to get herself talked about. As Miss Leland, of the Angler's

Nest, a sort of useful companion to her brother's wife, she is a nobody. If she can get a reputation for piety and philanthropy, that will be better than nothing. Or she may be only angling for a husband."

"If you knew her as well as I do you would know that she is above all such trivial and self-seeking motives, and that she is good to these people because her heart has gone out to them."

"Ah, but you see we don't know her. Her brother has chosen to hold himself aloof from Glenaveril; and I must say I am very glad he has taken that line—for more than one reason."

"If any of your reasons concern Miss Leland you are very much mistaken in under-rating her. You could not have had a more delightful companion," said Mr. Colfox, with some warmth.

"Oh, we all know that you have exalted her into a heroine—a St. John's Wood St. Helena. But she is a little too unconventional for my taste; though I certainly would rather be intimate with her than with her sister-in-law."

"Surely you have no fault to find with that most gentle creature?"

"She is just a little too gentle for my taste," replied Alicia, who usually took upon herself all expression of opinion, while Belinda fanned herself languidly, in an æsthetic attitude, feeling that her chief mission in this life was to sit still and look like *la belle dame sans merci*. "She is just as much too quiet as Miss Leland is too boisterous. I have no liking for pensive young women who cast down their eyelids at the slightest provocation, and are only animated when they are flirting."

"The tongue is a little member," quoted Mr. Colfox, taking up his hat, and holding out his hand in adieu.

He was very unceremonious to these fair young parishioners of his, and talked to them as freely as if he had been an old French Abbé in a country village. It is needless to say that they valued his opinion so much the more because he was entirely unaffected by their wealth or their good looks. They were naturally aggrieved at his marked admiration for Miss Leland.

Those ripe months of harvest and vintage, July, August, and September, passed like a bliss-

ful dream for Martin Disney. He had snatched his darling from the jaws of death. He had her once more—fair to look upon, with sweet, smiling mouth and pensive eyes; and she was so tender and so loving to him, in fond gratitude for his devotion during her long malady, so seemingly happy in their mutual love for their child, that he forgot all those aching fears which had gnawed his heart while he sat by her pillow through the long, anxious nights—forgot that he had ever doubted her, or remembered his doubts only to laugh at himself as a morbid, jealous fool. Could he doubt her, who was candour and innocence personified? Could he think for an instant that all those sweet, loving ways and looks of hers which beautified his commonplace existence, were so much acting—and that her heart was not his? No! True love has an unmistakable language; and true love spoke to him in every word and tone of his wife's.

The child made so tender and close a bond between them. Both lives were seemingly bound and entwined about this fragile life of Isola's first-born. Mr. Baynham had no reason now to complain of his patient's want of the

maternal instinct. He had rather to expostulate and to restrain her in her devotion to the child. He had to reprove her for her sleepless nights and morbid anxieties.

"Do you think your baby will grow any the faster or stronger for your lying awake half the night worrying yourself about him?" said the doctor, with his cheery bluntness. "He has a capital nurse—one of those excellent cow-women, who are specially created to rear other people's babies; and he has a doctor who is not quite a fool about infant maladies. Read your novels, Mrs. Disney, and keep up your good looks; or else twenty years hence you will see your son blushing when he hears his mother mistaken for his grandmother."

After giving his patient this advice, Mr. Baynham told his wife, in confidence, that were anything to happen to the little one, Isola Disney would go off her head.

"I'm afraid she is sadly hysterical," replied Mrs. Baynham. "I am very fond of her, you know, Tom; but I have never been able to understand her. I can't make out a young woman who has a pretty house and an indul-

gent husband, and who never seems quite happy."

"Every woman can't have your genial disposition, Belle," answered the doctor, admiringly. "Perpetual sunshine is the rarest thing in Nature."

The early western harvest had been gathered in. Upland and valley in that undulating land were clothed with the dull, tawny hue of the stubble. Here and there the plough horses were moving slowly along the red ridges on the steep hillside. No touch of frost had dulled the rich hues of the autumnal flowers, and the red carnations still glowed in every cottage garden, while the pale pink trusses of the hydrangea filled all the shrubberies with beauty. A keener breath came up at eventide from the salt sea beyond Point Neptune, and wilder winds crept across the inland valleys with the on-coming of night. Summer and the swallows were gone. October, a balmy season for the most part, was at hand; and there were no more tea-drinkings and afternoon gossipings at the Angler's Nest. The lamps were lighted

before dinner. The evenings were spent in the old library and the new drawing-room, the new room communicating with the old one by a curtained archway, so that of a night the curtains could be drawn back and Martin Disney could sit among his books by the fireplace in the library, and yet be within conversational reach of Isola and Allegra in the drawing-room, where they had piano and table-easel, work-baskets, and occupations of all kinds.

Mr. Colfox sometimes dropped in of an evening, on parish business of course, took a cup of coffee, listened while Allegra played one of Mozart's sonatas or sang a song by Gluck or Haydn or Handel. Mr. Colfox was not one of the advanced people who despise Mozart or Handel. Nor did he look down upon Haydn. Indeed, he sat and stroked his thin legs with a sheepish appreciation, wrinkling up his loose trousers, and showing a large amount of wrinkled stocking, while Allegra sang "My mother bids me bind my hair," in her clear, strong mezzo-soprano, which was of infinite use to him in his choir.

He told everybody that Martin Disney's was

an ideal household—a home into which it was a privilege to be admitted.

"I feel as if I never knew the beauty of domestic life till I knew the Angler's Nest," he said one evening after dinner at Glenaveril, when he and the village doctor had accepted one of Mr. Crowther's pressing invitations to what he called "pot-luck," the pot-luck of the man whose spirit burns within him at the thought of his hundred-guinea cook, and whose pride is most intolerable when it apes humility.

"Really, now," said Mr. Crowther, "you surprise me, for I have always fancied there was a screw loose there."

"What does that expression imply, Mr. Crowther?" asked the curate, coldly.

"Oh, I don't know! Nothing specific: only one's notion of an ideal home doesn't generally take the shape of a beautiful girl of twenty married to a man of fifty. The disparity is just twice as much as it ought to be."

"Upon my soul," cried the curate, "I don't believe that wedded love is affected by any difference of years. Desdemona loved Othello, who was a man of mature age——"

"And black," interrupted Mr. Crowther, with a coarse laugh. "Well, let us be thankful that Colonel Disney is not a nigger; and that there is so much the less danger of a burst-up at the Angler's Nest. And now, Baynham, with regard to this footpath across the wood, who the deuce will be injured if I shut it up?"

"A good many people, and the people I think you would least like to injure," answered the doctor, sturdily. "Old people, and feeble, ailing people, who find the walk to church quite far enough even with the help of that short cut."

"Short cut be hanged!" cried Mr. Crowther, helping himself to a bumper of port, and passing on the decanter with hospitable emphasis. "It can't make a difference of a hundred yards."

"It does make a difference of over a quarter of a mile—and the proof is that everybody uses it, and that it goes by the name of the Church path. I wouldn't try to stop it, if I were you, Mr. Crowther. You are a popular man in the parish, for you—well, you have spent a heap of money in this place, and you subscribe liberally to all our charities and what not; but, I don't

mind telling you, if you were to try and shut off that old footpath across your wood, you'd be about the most unpopular man within a radius of ten miles."

"Don't talk about trying to shut it off, man," said Mr. Crowther, arrogantly. "If I choose to lock the gates to-morrow, I shall do it, and ask nobody's leave. The wood is my wood, and there's no clause in my title deeds as to any right of way through it; and I don't see why I am to have my hazel bushes pulled about, and my chestnut trees damaged by a pack of idle boys, under the pretence of church-going. There's the Queen's highway for 'em, d——n 'em!" cried Mr. Crowther, growing more insolent, as he gulped his fifth glass of Sandemann. "If that ain't good enough, let 'em go to the Ranters' Chapel at the other end of the village."

"I thought you were a staunch Conservative, Mr. Crowther, and an upholder of Church and State," said Mr. Colfox. "Am I to believe my ears when I hear you advocating the Ranters' Chapel?"

"It's good enough for such rabble as that, sir. What does it matter where they go?"

"Prosecute the boys for trespass, if you like," said the doctor; "though I doubt if you'll get a magistrate to impose more than a nominal fine for the offence of taking a handful of nuts in a wood that has been open ever since I began to walk, and heaven knows how many years before; but let the old gaffers and goodies creep to church by the shortest path that can take them there. They'll have to travel by the Queen's highway later, when they go to the churchyard —but then they'll be carried. Don't interfere with the privileges of the poor, Mr. Crowther. No one ever did that yet and went scot free. There's always somebody to take up the cudgels for them."

"I don't care a doit for anybody's cudgels, Baynham. I shall have a look at my title deeds to-morrow; and if there's no stipulation about the right of way, you'll find the gates locked next Sunday morning."

Sunday morning came, and the gates at each end of the old footpath were still open, and nothing had come of Mr. Crowther's threat. The gates had stood open so long, and were so old and rotten, their lower timbers so embedded

in the soft, oozy soil, so entangled and overgrown with foxglove and fern, so encrusted with moss and lichen, that it is doubtful if anybody could have closed them. They seemed as much rooted in the ground as the great brown fir trunks which rose in rugged majesty beside them.

CHAPTER XI.

"WHERE THE COLD SEA RAVES."

In the keen, fresh October afternoons, there was no walk Allegra loved better than the walk to Neptune Point, and higher up by winding foot-paths to the Rashleigh Mausoleum, fitting sepulchre for a race born and bred within reach of the salt sea-foam; a stately tomb perched on a rocky pinnacle at the end of a promontory, like a sea-bird's nest overhanging the wave.

Allegra was in raptures with that strange resting-place.

"I like it ever so much better than your Cockneyfied flower-garden cemetery," she exclaimed. "Think how grand it must be to lie for ever within the sound of the sea—the terrible, inscrutable sea, whose anger means death—the calm, summer sea, whose waves come dancing up the

sands, singing sweet lullabies. I wonder whether the Rashleighs would let me have a little grave of my own somewhere among these crags and hillocks—a modest little grave, hidden under wild foliage, which nobody would ever notice? Only I should hear the sea just as well as they do in their marble tomb."

"Oh, Allegra, how can you talk so lightly of death?" said Isola, shocked at this levity. "To me it is always dreadful to think of—and yet it must come."

"Poor child!" said Allegra, with infinite pity, putting her arm round her sister-in-law's slighter figure, as they stood by the railing of the Mausoleum, in the loveliness of an October sunset.

The sun had just gone down, veiled in autumnal haze, and behind the long ridge of waters beyond the Dodman there glowed the deep crimson of the western sky. Eastward above the Polruan hills the full moon moved slowly upward, amidst dark masses of cloud which melted and rolled away before her oncoming, till all the sky became of one dark azure. The two girls went down the hill in silence, Allegra holding Isola's

arm, linked with her own, steadying those weaker footsteps with the strength of her own firm movements. The difference between the two in physical force was no less marked than the difference in their mental characteristics, and Allegra's love for her sister-in-law was tempered with a tender compassion for something so much weaker than herself.

"Poor child!" she repeated, as they moved slowly downward on the steep, narrow path, "and do you really shudder at the thought of death? I don't. I have only a vast curiosity. Do you remember that definition of Sir Thomas Browne's which Martin read to us once—'Death is the Lucina of life.' Death only opens the door of the hidden worlds which are waiting for all of us to discover. It is only an appalling name for a new birth. I love to dream about the infinite possibilities of the future—just as a boy might dream of the time when he should become a man. Look, look, Isa, there's a yacht coming in! Isn't it a lovely sight?"

It was a long, narrow vessel, with all her canvas spread, gleaming with a silvery whiteness in the moonlight. Slowly and with majestic

motion she swept round towards Neptune Point and the mouth of the harbour. There was only the lightest wind, and the waves were breaking gently on the rocks at the base of the promontory —a night as calm and fair as June.

"Look!" repeated Allegra, "isn't she lovely? like a fairy boat. Whose yacht can she be, I wonder? She looks like a racer, doesn't she?"

Isola did not answer. She had seen such a yacht three years ago; had seen such a long, narrow hull lying in the harbour under repairs; had seen the same craft sailing out to Mevagissey on a trial trip in the wintry sunlight. Doubtless there were many yachts in this world of just the same build and character.

They stood at an angle of the hill-path looking up the river, and saw the yacht take in her canvas as she came into the haven under the hill; that sheltered harbour, with its two rivers cleaving the hills asunder, one winding away to the right towards Lerrin, the other to the left towards Trelasco and Lostwithiel. It looked so perfect a place of shelter, so utterly safe from tempest or foul weather; and yet there were seasons when the wild sea winds came sweeping

up the deep valleys, and all the storms of the Atlantic seemed at play in that narrow gorge. To-night the atmosphere was unusually calm, and Isola could hear the sailors singing at their work.

Slowly, slowly the two young women went down the hill, Allegra full of speculation and wonderment about the unknown vessel, Isola curiously silent. As they neared the hotel a man landed from a dinghy, and came briskly up the slippery, hard causeway—a tall, slim figure in the vivid moonlight, loose limbed, loosely clad, moving with easiest motion.

Isola turned sick at the sight of him. She stopped, helplessly, hopelessly, and stood staring straight before her, watching him as he came nearer and nearer, nearer and nearer—like some awful figure in a nightmare dream, when the feet of the dreamer seem frozen to the ground, and flesh and blood seem changed to ice and stone.

He came nearer, looked at them, and passed them by—passed as one who knew them not, and was but faintly curious about them. He passed and walked quickly up towards the

Point, with the rapid swinging movements of one who was glad to tread the solid earth.

No, it was not Lostwithiel. She had thought at first that no one else could look so like him at so short a distance; no one else could have that tall, slender figure, and easy, buoyant walk. But the face she saw in the moonlight was not his. It was like, but not the same: darker, with larger features, a face of less delicacy and distinction; but oh, God! how like the eyes that had looked at her, with that brief glance of casual inspection, were to those other eyes that had poured their passionate story into her own that unforgotten night when she sat out the after-supper waltzes in the ante-room at the Talbot. She could not have believed that any man living could so recall the man whose name she never spoke of her own free will.

There were some sailors standing about at the top of the steep little bit of road leading down to the granite causeway, and their voices sounded fresh and clear in the still evening, mixed with the rippling rush of the water as it came running up the stones. The moonlight shone full upon one of the men as he stood with his face towards

the sea, and Isola read the name upon the front of his hat.

"*Vendetta.*"

"*Vendetta,*" cried Allegra, quick to observe the name. "Why, is not that Lord Lostwithiel's yacht?"

"Yes—I think so," faltered Isola.

"Then that must have been Lord Lostwithiel who passed us just now; and yet you would have known him, wouldn't you?"

"That was not Lord Lostwithiel."

"A friend of his, I suppose; such a nice-looking man, too. There was something so frank and cheery in his look as he just glanced at us both and marched briskly on. He did not pay us the compliment of seeming curious. I wonder who he is?"

Isola was wondering about something else. She was looking with a frightened gaze across the harbour, towards that one break in the long golden trail of the moonbeams where the *Vendetta* cast her shadow on the water. There were lamps gleaming brightly here and there upon the vessel—a look of occupation.

"Is Lord Lostwithiel on board his yacht?"

Allegra asked of one of the sailors, not ashamed to appear inquisitive.

"No, ma'am; Mr. Hulbert is skipper."

"Who is Mr. Hulbert?"

"His lordship's brother."

"Was that he who went up towards the Point just now?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Is he going to stop here long, do you know?"

"I don't think he knows himself, ma'am. It'll depend upon the weather most likely. If we get a fair wind we may be off to the Lizard at an hour's notice, and away up north to the Hebrides."

"Doesn't that seem inconsistent?" exclaimed Allegra, as they walked homewards. "What is the good of coming to Cornwall if he wants to go to the Hebrides? It must be very much out of his way."

"He may want to see his old home, perhaps. He was born at the Mount, you know."

"Indeed! I don't know anything about him, but I want to know ever so much. I call it an interesting face."

Allegra was full of animation during the home-

ward walk. A stranger of any kind must needs be a God-send, as affording a subject for conversation; but such a stranger as Lostwithiel's brother offered a theme of strongest interest. She had heard so much about Lord Lostwithiel and all his works and ways—the pity of it that he did not marry; the still greater pity that he did not live at the Mount, and give shooting parties and spend money in the neighbourhood. She had heard in a less exalted key of his lordship's younger brother, who had fought under Beresford in Egypt, and who had only lately left the navy. What more natural than that such a man should sail his brother's yacht?

Captain Hulbert was still unmarried; but no one talked about the pity of that. People took a severely sensible view of his case, and were unanimous in the opinion that he could not afford to marry, and that any aspiration in that line would be criminal on his part. There was an idea at Trelasco that the younger sons of peers of moderate fortune have been specially designed by Providence to keep up the race of confirmed bachelors. There must be bachelors; the world cannot get on without them; society

requires them as a distinct element in social existence; and it would ill become the offshoots of the peerage to shrink from fulfilling their destiny.

Allegra was not the less curious about Captain Hulbert, although his celebate mission had been frequently expounded to her. She was interested in him because she liked his face, because he was Lostwithiel's brother, because he was sailing a very beautiful yacht, because he had appeared in her life with a romantic suddenness, sailing out of the sea unheralded and unexpected, like a man who had dropped from the moon.

She fell asleep that night wondering if she would ever see him again—if the *Vendetta* would have vanished from the harbour to-morrow at noontide, like a boat that had only lived in her dreams; or whether the yacht would still be anchored there in the haven under the hill. And, if so, whether Captain Hulbert would call at the Angler's Nest, and tell them about Lostwithiel's South American adventures, and how he came to be skipper of his brother's yacht.

At breakfast next morning, Colonel Disney's

talk was chiefly about Captain Hulbert. The colonel had been for an early walk, and had seen the *Vendetta* from the little Quay at Fowey, by the Mechanics' Institute, and had heard who was the skipper.

"I remember him when he and his brother were at Eton together—nice boys—capital boys, both of them—but I liked Jack Hulbert better than Lostwithiel. He was franker, more spontaneous and impulsive. Yes, Jack was my favourite, and everybody else's favourite, I think, when the two were boys. I saw very little of them after they grew up. I was away with my regiment, and Jack was away with his ship, and Lostwithiel was wandering up and down the earth, like Satan. I left a card for Captain Hulbert at the club, asking him to dinner this evening. You don't mind, do you, Isola?"

Isola had no objection to offer, and Allegra was delighted at the prospect of seeing more of the man with the nice frank countenance, and that seafaring air which most women like.

"I am a dreadful person for being influenced by first impressions," she said, "and that one

glance at Captain Hulbert in the moonlight assures me that I shall like him."

"Don't like him too well," said Martin, laughingly, "for I'm afraid he's a detrimental, and would make even a worse match than Colfox, who may be a bishop one day, while Hulbert has left the navy, and is never likely to be anything."

"Match! detrimental!" cried Allegra, indignantly. "Can it be my brother who talks in such a vulgar strain? As if a woman could not look at a man without thinking of marrying him!"

"Some women can't," answered Martin. "With them every free man is a possible husband—indeed, I believe there are some who cannot look at a married man without estimating the chances of the divorce court—if the man is what they call a catch."

"That is your Indian experience!" exclaimed Allegra, scornfully. "I have heard that India is a sink of iniquity."

She went about her day's varied work as usual —curious to see the new acquaintance—yet in no wise excited. Vivid and animated, enthusi-

astic and energetic as she was in all her thoughts and ways, gushing sentimentality made no part of Miss Leland's character. Life at Trelasco flowed with such an even monotony, there was such an utter dearth of new interests, that it was only natural that a girl of vivacious temper should be curious about new-comers. At St. John's Wood every day had brought some new element into the lives of the students, and almost every day had brought a new pupil, drawn thither by the growing renown of the master, pupils from the uttermost ends of the earth sometimes, pupils of swart complexion speaking unknown tongues, pupils patrician and pupils plebeian, each and all conforming to the same stringent rules of art, spending weeks and months in the shading of a brace of plums or a bunch of grapes, from a plaster cast, and toiling slowly up the gradual ascent which leads to the Royal Academy and the gold medal. Many there were who sickened at the slow rate of progress and who fell away. Only the faithful remained. And this going and coming, this strife between faith and unfaith, patience and impatience, had made a perpetual movement in

the life of the great school—to say nothing of such bodily activities as lawn tennis, for which the master had provided a court—a court for his girl-pupils, be it noted, where they played among themselves, as if they had been so many collegians in the college of Tennyson's "Princess."

Allegra had liked her life at the great art school, but she had never regretted its abandonment. She loved her brother, and her brother's wife, better even than she loved art. It was only now and then that she felt that her existence at Trelasco was as monotonous as the flow of the river going up and coming down day by day between Lostwithiel and the sea.

She spent the hours between breakfast and luncheon hard at work in her painting-room—a little room with a large window facing northward. She had the coachman's girl and boy for her models, and was engaged upon a little water-colour picture after the school of Mrs. Allingham, a little picture which told its story with touching simplicity.

It was not the first picture of the kind she had painted. Several of her works had been

exhibited at the minor galleries which are hospitable to the new-comer in the world of art; and two small pictures had been bought at prices which seemed to promise her an easy road to fortune.

The coachman's children profited greatly by this new profession which had been devised for them. Allegra made their frocks in her leisure hours, when the active fingers must have something to do, while the active tongue ran on gaily in happy talk with Martin and Isola. Allegra made up to her little models for their hours of enforced idleness by extra tuition which kept them ahead of most of the other pupils in the village school; and Allegra supplied them with pocket-money.

"I don't know however the children got on before Miss Leland came," said the coachman's wife. "They seem to look to her for everything."

Allegra had other models, village children, and village girls—her beauty-girl, a baker's daughter with a splendid semi-Greek face, like Mrs. Langtry's, whom she dressed up in certain cast-off finery of her own, and painted in her genre pic-

tures, now in this attitude, and now in that, imparting an air of distinction which elevated the Cornish peasant into a patrician. She it was, this baker's fair-haired daughter, who stood for Allegra's successful picture—"A daughter of the gods, divinely tall," a little bit of finished painting which had brought the painter five and thirty guineas—boundless wealth as it seemed to her—and ever so many commissions.

Art, even in despondency and failure, is a consolation; art successful is an intoxicating delight. Allegra was as happy a young woman as could be found in Cornwall that day, when she shut her colour-box, dismissed her little maiden, and ran down to lunch, where she found Isola more silent than usual, and made amends by her own light-hearted chatter for the morning's absorption over the easel. After lunch she ran off to the village to pay her parish visits to the sick and old, and on her way to an outlying cottage she met Mr. Colfox, who immediately turned to accompany her, a way he had, but a way to which she had never attached any significance. He was a clever, well-read man, of somewhat original temper, who had to pass most

of his life among unlettered or dull people; therefore it surprised Allegra in no wise that he should like to talk to her. A bright, attractive girl of three and twenty is very unsuspicious about the feelings of a homely looking man at least a dozen years her senior.

"Your brother has been good enough to ask me to dinner," he said, after a little talk about the Goodies and their ailments. "I met him at the club this morning."

"He wants you to meet Captain Hulbert. Perhaps you know him already?"

"No, he has not been here within my time. He only left the navy a year ago, and he was generally stationed at the utmost ends of the earth, keeping guard over our remote possessions. Have you seen him?"

"Only for an instant. He passed my sister and me yesterday evening in the moonlight. I thought he looked a nice person—but I think women have a natural leaning towards sailors. I could never imagine a seaman telling a falsehood or doing a mean action."

"There is a kind of open-air manner which suggests truthfulness," admitted Mr. Colfox.

"Yet there have been dark deeds done by sailors; there have been black sheep even in the Queen's Navee. However, I believe Captain Hulbert is worthy of your good opinion. I have never heard anybody speak against him, and the old people who knew him as a lad seem to have liked him better than Lord Lostwithiel."

"Do tell me your opinion of Lord Lostwithiel. I am very curious about him. Mr. Crowther talked of him so much the night we were at Glenaveril."

"Mr. Crowther loves a lord."

"Please satisfy my curiosity. Is he really such a fascinating personage?"

"He has very pleasant manners. I don't know what constitutes fascination in a man, though I know pretty well what it means in a woman. Lord Lostwithiel's manners are chiefly distinguished by repose without languor or affectation—and by an interest in other people so cleverly simulated that it deceives everybody. One finds him out by the way in which people boast of his friendship. He cannot be so attached to all the world. He has a manner which is generally described as sympathetic."

"Mr. Crowther enlarged a good deal upon his lordship's admiration for my sister at the Hunt Ball. Was that so very marked?"

Mr. Colfox coloured violently at this direct question—assuredly not easy to answer truthfully without hazard of offence.

"I was not at the ball—I—I heard people talk a little—in the way people talk of everything—about Lostwithiel's attention to Mrs. Disney, and about her prettiness—they all agreed that if not the loveliest woman in the room, she was at least the most interesting."

"It was very natural that he should admire her; but I don't think Martin liked Mr. Crowther's talking about it in that way, at the dinner-table. The man is horridly underbred. Has Lord Lostwithiel what you call—" she hesitated a little—"a good character?"

"I don't know about the present. I have heard that in the past his reputation was not altogether good."

"I understand," said Allegra, quickly. "The admiration of such a man is an insult; and that is why Mr. Crowther harped upon the fact. I am sure he is a malevolent man."

"Don't be hard upon him, Miss Leland. I believe he has only the misfortune to be a cad—a cad by birth, education, and associations. Don't fling your stone at such a man—consider what an unhappy fate it is."

"Oh, but he does not think himself unhappy. He is bursting with self-importance and the pride of riches. He is the typical rich man of the Psalmist. He must be the happiest man in Trelasco, a thick-skinned man whom nothing can hurt."

"I am sorry you think so badly of poor Mr. Crowther, because I am really attached to his wife. She is one of the best women I know."

"So my sister tells me, and I was very much taken with her myself, but one cannot afford to be friendly with Mrs. Crowther at the cost of knowing her husband."

She spoke with some touch of the insolence of youth, which sets so high a value upon its own opinions and its own independence, and looks upon all the rest of humanity as upon a lower plane. And this arrogant youth, which thinks so meanly of the multitude, will make its own exceptions, and reverence its chosen ideals with

a blind hero-worship—for its love is always an upward-looking love, "the desire of the moth for the star."

Mr. Colfox sighed, and smiled at the same moment, a sad little half-cynical smile. He was thinking how impossible it was to refrain from admiring this bright out-spoken girl, with her quick intellect, and her artistic instincts, so spiritual, so unworldly, and fresh as an April morning—how impossible not to admire, how difficult not to love her, and how hopeless to love.

He thought of himself with scathing self-contempt—middle-aged, homely of feature and of figure, with nothing to recommend him except good birth, a small independence—just so much as enabled him to live where he pleased and serve whom he would, without reference to the stipend attached to the cure; and a little rusty, dry-as-dust learning. Nothing more than this; and he wanted to win and wed a girl whose image never recurred to his mind without the suggestion of a rose garden, or a summer morning. Yes, she reminded him of morning and dewy red roses, those old-fashioned heavy red

roses, round as a cup, and breathing sweetest, purest perfume.

He jogged on by her side in silence, and only awoke from his reverie to bid her good-bye at the gate of a cottage garden, in the lane that led up the hill to Tywardreath.

CHAPTER XII.

"FAR, TOO FAR OFF FOR THOUGHT OR ANY PRAYER."

Mr. Colfox and Allegra met again in the drawing-room of the Angler's Nest at a quarter to eight. He was the first to arrive, and Isola had not yet appeared. Martin Disney was at his post in front of the library fireplace, library and drawing-room making one spacious room, lighted with candles here and there, and with one large shaded lamp on a table near the piano. Isola had been suffering from headache, and had been late in dressing. Captain Hulbert had been in the room nearly ten minutes before his hostess appeared, looking pale and ill in her black lace gown, and with an anxious expression in her eyes. He had been introduced to Allegra, and was talking to her as if he had known her for

years, when his attention was called off by Isola's appearance, and his introduction to her.

Was this Martin Disney's wife, he thought wonderingly—such a girlish fragile creature—so unlike the woman he had pictured to himself. Strange that Lostwithiel should not have told him of her delicate prettiness, seeing that he was a connoisseur in beauty, and hypercritical.

"This is just the kind of beauty he would admire," thought Hulbert, "something out of the common—a pale, spiritual beauty—not dependent upon colouring, or even upon regularity of feature—the kind of thing one calls soul, not having found a better name for it."

They went in to dinner presently, Captain Hulbert and Isola, Mr. Colfox and Allegra. The table was a small oval, at which five people made a snug little party. There was a central mass of white chrysanthemums, a cheerful glow of coloured Venetian glass, delicatest pink and jade-green, under the light of a hanging moderator lamp. John Hulbert looked round him with a pleased expression, taking in the flowers, the glass, the delicate cream-white china, the lamplight, everything; and then the two

fair young faces, one pale and pensive, the other aglow with the delight of life, eagerly expectant of new ideas.

They talked of the *Vendetta* and the places at which she had touched lately. Captain Hulbert had spent his summer on the Eastern Liguria, between Genoa and Civita Vecchia.

"Wasn't it the wrong time of year for Italy?" asked Mr. Colfox.

"No, it is the season of seasons in the land of the sun. If you want to enjoy a southern country, go there in the summer. The south is made for summer, her houses are built for hot weather, her streets are planned for shade in midsummer; her wines, her food, her manners and customs have all been made for summer-time—not for winter. If you want to know Italy at her worst go there in cold weather."

"Where did you leave Lord Lostwithiel?" Disney asked presently.

"I left him nowhere. He left me to rove about Southern Europe—left me on his way to Carinthia. He is like the wandering Jew. He used to be mad about yachting; but he got sick of the *Vendetta* all of a sudden, and handed her

over to me. Very generous on his part; but the boat is something of a white elephant for a man of my small means. I wanted him to sell her. Wouldn't hear of it. To let her. Not to be thought of. 'I'll lend her to you,' he said, 'and you shall keep her as long as you like—sink her, if you like—provided you don't go down in her. She is not a lucky boat.'"

"Have you sailed her long?"

"Nearly a year, and I love her as if she were bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. Let us all go for a sail to-morrow, Mrs. Disney—to Mevagissey or thereabouts. We could do a little fishing. It will be capital fun. What do you say, Miss Leland?"

"I should adore it," said Allegra, beaming at him. "The sea is my passion—and I think it is my sister's passion too. We are a kind of amphibious creatures, living more on water than on land. We venture as far as we dare in a row-boat—but oh, that is such a little way."

"I'm afraid sometimes you will venture so far that you won't be able to get back again, and will find yourselves drifting away to America," said her brother.

Isola answered never a word, until Captain Hulbert addressed her pointedly for the second time.

"Will you go, Mrs. Disney—may we make up the party?"

"I would rather not," she answered, without looking at him.

"But why not? Are you such a bad sailor—in spite of all Miss Leland says of you?"

"I am a pretty good sailor in a row-boat—but not in a yacht. And I hate fishing—such a slow weary business. I would rather not go."

"I am so sorry; but you must not be worried about it," said Hulbert, kindly, seeing the growing distress in her countenance. "We will not go in for fishing—or excursions—but you and Miss Leland will at least come to afternoon tea on the *Vendetta*—to afternoon tea in the harbour. There used to be a comic song when I was a boy —'Come and drink tea in the arbour.' You must come to the arbour with an aspirate. It is not so rustic or sentimental—but there will be no earwigs or creeping things to drop into your teacup. Mr. Colfox, you will come, won't you?"

"I shall be delighted," answered the curate. "I have a sneaking kindness for all yachts."

The conversation drifted back to Lostwithiel and his works and ways, presently.

"When he went home three years ago he gave me to understand he was going to settle down at the Mount, and spend the rest of his days in peace and respectability," said Captain Hulbert. "Yet, very soon afterwards, he and his yacht were off again like the *Flying Dutchman*, and the next I heard of him was at Leghorn, and six months later he was coasting off Algiers and Tangier; and the following spring he was in South America; and the *Vendetta* was laid up at Marseilles, where he begged me to go and look after her, and take her to myself until such time as he should want her again. I was with him for a few days at Leghorn, where he seemed ill and out of spirits. I don't think you can have used him over well in this part of the world, Mrs. Disney," he added, half in jest. "I fancy some of you must have snubbed him severely, or his tenants must have worried him by their complaints and exactions. I could not get him to talk about his life at the Mount. He

seemed to have taken a disgust for the old home."

"You must put that down to his roving temper," said Disney, "for although I was away at the time, I can answer for it there was no such thing as snubbing in the case. Your brother is the only peer in these parts, and from the way people talk about him he might be the only peer in Great Britain—the Alpha and Omega of Debrett. Our parvenu neighbour, Mr. Crowther, talked of him one night with a slavish rapture which made me sick. I am a Tory by association and instinct, but I can't stand the vulgarian's worship of a lord."

Isola looked at her sister-in-law, and they both rose at this moment, the Church almost tumbling over the Navy in eagerness to open the door; Navy winning by a neck.

They were not long alone in the drawing-room, not more than the space of a single cigarette, before the men followed. Then came music, and a good deal of talk, in the long, low, spacious room, which looked so bright and homely by candlelight, with all its tokens of domestic and intellectual life.

"What a capital quarter-deck this is," cried John Hulbert, after pacing up and down while he listened, and talked, and laughed at Allegra's little jokes about the narrowness of village life. "It is delightful to stretch one's legs in such a room as this, after six months upon an eighty-ton yacht."

"You will have room enough to stretch your legs at the Mount," said Disney.

Captain Hulbert had announced his intention of spending a week or two under the family roof-tree while the *Vendetta* underwent some slight repairs and renovations.

"Room enough and to spare," he said. "I shan't feel half so jovial walking up and down those grim old rooms as I feel here. I shall fancy a ghost pacing behind me, clump, clump, clump—a slow, solemn footstep—only the echo of my own tread perhaps; but I shall never know, for I shall be afraid to look round."

"You ought not to make sport of weak people's fancies, for I am sure you don't believe in ghosts," said Allegra, leaning with one elbow on the piano, turning over pieces of music absently, a graceful figure in a dark green velvet

gown, cut just low enough to show the fine curves of a full, round throat, white and smooth as ivory.

"Not believe in ghosts? Did you ever know a sailor who wasn't superstitious? We are too often alone with the sea and the stars to be quite free from spectral fancies, Miss Leland. I can see in your eyes as you look at me this moment that you believe in ghosts—believe and tremble. Tell me now, candidly—When do you most fear them? At what hour of the day or night does the unreal seem nearest to you?"

"I don't know," she faltered, turning over the loose music with a faintly tremulous gesture, while Isola sat by the piano, touching the notes dumbly now and then.

"Is it at midnight—in the gloaming—in the chill, mysterious dawn? You won't answer! Shall I guess? If you are like me, it is in broad daylight—between two and three in the afternoon—when the servants are all idling after their dinner, and the house is silent. You are alone in a big, bright room, perhaps, with another room opening out of it, and a door a long way off. You sit writing at your table, and you feel

all at once that the room is haunted—there must be something or some one stealing in at that remotest door. You daren't look round. You go to the window and look out into garden or street—for a town house may be just as ghastly as a country one—and then with a great effort you turn slowly round and face your terror, in the broad, garish sunlight, in the business hours of the day. There is nothing there, of course; but the feeling has not been the less vivid. I know I shall be spectre-haunted at the Mount. You must all come and scare away the shadows. Mr. Colfox, are you fond of billiards?"

"I own to a liking for the game. I play with Mr. Crowther and his youngest daughter whenever I dine at Glenaveril. Alicia is a very fine player, for a girl, and her father plays a good game."

"Then you will come up to the Mount two or three times a week and play with me, I hope. There's a fine Thurston table. It may be a little out of order, but we must make the best of it—and there's plenty of sound claret in the cellars, to say nothing of a keg or two of Schiedam that I sent home from the Hague."

"Mr. Colfox will not make much impression either on your claret or your schnapps," said Disney, laughing. "He is almost as temperate as one of those terrible anchorites in the novel we were reading the other day—'Homo Sum.'"

"I am glad you put in the qualifying 'almost,'" said the curate, "for I hope to taste Captain Hulbert's Schiedam."

The captain expatiated upon what his three new friends—and his one old friend, Martin Disney—were to do to cheer him in his solitude at the Mount.

"There is nothing of the anchorite about me," he said. "I love society, I love life and movement, I love bright faces."

He would not leave until they had all promised to take tea on board the yacht on the following afternoon, an engagement which was kept by Allegra and the colonel; but not by Isola, whose headache was worse after the little dinner-party; nor by the curate, who had parish business to detain him on shore.

CHAPTER XIII.

"UNDER THE PINE-WOOD, BLIND WITH BOUGHS."

If Isola had any disinclination to visit Captain Hulbert's yacht, her headache only served to defer the evil day, for after that first tea-drinking came other invitations and other arrangements, fishing-parties, luncheons off Mevagissey, entertainments in which Isola must needs share when she saw her husband and his sister bent upon the enjoyment of the hour, delighted with the *Vendetta* and her warm-hearted skipper.

They were not John Hulbert's only friends in the neighbourhood. Everybody seemed glad to welcome the rover to his native village. Almost everybody had known him in his boyhood; and there was a general consensus of opinion that he was a much better fellow than his brother. He was less courted; but he was better liked.

There had been a touch of cynicism about Lostwithiel which frightened matter-of-fact country people.

"One could never feel sure he wasn't laughing in his sleeve at our rustic ignorance," said Mrs. Baynham. "I am more at my ease with Captain Hulbert."

So the brief Indian summer passed in pleasant idlesse on a tranquil sea. The equinoctial gales had not begun to rage yet. There was a lull before the coming of the great winds which were to blow good ships on shore, and startle sleepers in the dead of night. All now was fair and placid—sunlit waters, golden evenings. They spent one bright, balmy day off Mevagissey, a day which was like a long dream to Isola, as she sat on deck in a low folding-chair, wrapped in a great feathery rug from the South Sea Islands, with her languid head reclining against a plush-covered cushion, one of the many effeminate luxuries which abounded in the cabin below. Everybody else was intent upon the nets. Everybody else was full of interest and movement and expectation; but she sat apart from all, with her ivory

knitting-needles lying idle in her lap, amidst a soft mass of white wool, which her industry was to convert into a garment for the baby.

Allegra was enraptured with the yacht. She would fain have taken Isola down to the cabins below, to explore their wonders of luxury and contrivance, so much comfort and elegance in so restricted an area; but Isola refused to leave the deck.

"I hate all cabins," she said. "They are always suffocatingly hot."

So Mrs. Baynham went below with Allegra, and they two explored the two principal cabins with wondering admiration, and even peeped into the cook's galley, and the odd little places where steward and sailors contrived to bestow themselves.

The chief cabin, saloon, or whatever one liked to call it, was as daintily decorated as a lady's boudoir. There were nests of richly bound books, Oriental bronzes, and all kinds of continental pottery, Japanese and Indian embroideries, Venetian mirrors, quaint little carved cupboards for wine or cigars. Every corner and cranny was utilized.

"What a delicious drawing-room!" cried Allegra. "I could live here all my life. Fancy, how delightful! A floating life. No such thing as satiety. One might open one's eyes every morning on a fresh coast, glorified, as one sees it across the bright, blue water. To explore the Mediterranean, for instance, floating from city to city—the cities of the past, the cities of the Gospel, the shores that were trodden by the feet of St. Paul and his companions—the cities of the Christian saints and martyrs, the island birthplaces of Greek gods and heroes. Think, Mrs. Baynham! A yacht like this is a master-key to open all the gateways of the world."

"I would rather have my own cosy little cottage on terra firma," answered the doctor's wife in a matter-of-fact mood; but this speech of Allegra's set the good lady pondering upon the possibility of John Hulbert falling in love with this nice, clever girl, and making her mistress of his brother's yacht.

Her friendly fancy depicted the village wedding, and those two going forth over the great waters to spend their honeymoon amidst the

wonder-world of the Mediterranean, which the banker's daughter knew only in her Atlas.

"He can't be rich," she thought, "but he must have a comfortable income. I know his mother had money. And Allegra can earn a good deal by her painting. She wouldn't be an expensive wife. We ought all to do our best to bring it about. A girl has so few chances in such a place as Trelasco. She might almost as well be in a convent."

Mrs. Baynham was at heart a matchmaker, like most motherly women whom fate has left childless. She was very fond of Allegra, who was so much brighter and more companionable than Isola, so much more responsive to kindness and affection. As she sat on deck in the westering sunlight, somewhat comatose after a copious luncheon, Mrs. Baynham's idea of helping Allegra took the form of a dinner-party which she had long been meditating, her modest return for numerous dinners which she had eaten at Glenaveril and at the Angler's Nest. She considered that three or four times a year it behoved her to make a serious effort in the way of hospitality—a substantial and elaborate dinner, in which no

good things in season should be spared, and which should be served with all due ceremony. The time was at hand when such a dinner would in a manner fall due; and she determined to hasten the date with a view to Allegra's interests.

"Captain Hulbert is sure to be off again before long," she told herself, "so every evening they can spend together is of importance. I'm sure he is inclined to fall in love with her already."

There was not much doubt about his feelings as he stood by Allegra in the stern, directing the movements of her bare active hands while she hauled in the net; not much doubt that he was as deep in love as a man well can be after a fortnight's acquaintance. He did not make any secret of his bondage, but let his eyes tell all the world that this girl was for him "the world's one woman."

The invitation from Mrs. Baynham was delivered by post next morning, as ceremonious a card as if the place were Mayfair, and the invitor and invitees had not met since last season. A copper-plate card, with name and address filled in by the lady's pen, a detail which distinguished her modest invitation from the Glenaveril cards,

of which there were a variety, for at homes, tennis, dinner, luncheon, to accept, and to decline. A fortnight's notice marked the dignity of the occasion—the hour the orthodox quarter to eight.

"We can't refuse, Isola," said Disney, when his wife handed him the card, "although my past experience assures me that the evening will be a trifle heavy. Why will people in small houses insist upon giving dinner-parties, instead of having their friends in instalments? When we go to dine with the Baynhams we go for love of them, not the people they bring together; and yet they insist upon seating twelve in a room that will just comfortably hold eight. It is all vanity and confusion of spirit."

"But Mrs. Baynham is so happy when she is giving a real dinner-party. I don't think we can refuse, can we, Allegra?" asked Isola.

"Mrs. Baynham is a darling, and I wouldn't vex her for worlds," replied her sister-in-law. "And in a place like this one can't pretend a prior engagement, unless it were in the moon."

The invitation was accepted forthwith, and when Captain Hulbert dropped in at tea-time it was discovered that he, too, had been asked, and

that he meant to accept, if his friends at the Angler's Nest were to be there.

A thunderbolt fell upon the little village on the following Sunday. When the old men and women, creeping to church a little in advance of younger legs, came to the church-path, they found the gate locked against them, locked and barricaded with bars which looked as if they were meant to last till the final cataclasm. The poor old creatures looked up wonderingly at a newly-painted board, on which the more intelligent among them spelt out the following legend—

"This wood is the private property of J. Vansittart Crowther, Esq. Trespassers will be prosecuted."

Martin Disney and his wife and sister came up when a little crowd of men, women, and children, numbering about thirty, had assembled round the gate, all in their Sunday best.

"What's the meaning of this?" asked Disney.

"Ah, colonel, that's what we all want to know," replied old Manley, the village carpenter, a bent and venerable figure, long past work.

"I'm over eighty, but I never remember that gate being locked as long as I have lived at Trelasco, and that's all my life, colonel. There's always been a right of way through that wood."

"And there always shall be," answered Martin Disney. "We won't take any violent measures to-day, my friends—first because it is Sunday, and next because one should always try fair means before one tries foul. I shall write to Mr. Crowther to-morrow, asking him civilly to open that gate. If he refuses, I'll have it opened for him, and I'll take the consequences of the act. Now, my good friends, you'd better go to church by the road. You'll get there after the service has begun. Wait till the congregation are standing up, and then go into church all together, so that everybody may understand why and by whose fault it is that you are late."

The appearance of this large contingent after the first lesson created considerable surprise, and much turning of heads and rustling of bonnet-strings in the echoing old stone church. Mr. Crowther sat in his pew of state on one side of the chancel, and felt that the war had begun. Everybody was against him in the matter, he

knew; but he wanted to demonstrate the rich man's right to do what he liked with the things which he had bought. The wood was his, and he did not mean to let the whole parish tramp across it.

He received a stiffly polite letter from Colonel Disney, requesting him to re-open the church-path without loss of time, and informing him of the great inconvenience caused to the older and weaker members of the congregation by the illegal closing of the path during church hours.

Mr. Crowther sent his reply by the colonel's messenger. He asserted his right to shut up the wood which formed a part of his estate, and positively refused to re-open the gate at either end of the footpath in question.

Captain Hulbert dropped in at his usual hour, eager to know the progress of the fight. Fight there must be, he was assured, having seen something of Mr. Crowther's bull-dog temper. Then, in the drawing-room of the Angler's Nest, there was hatched a terrible plot—a Catiline conspiracy in a tea-cup—Allegra listening and applauding while the two men plotted.

That night, when the village was hushed in

sleep, a boatful of sailors landed at the little hard near the railway station at Fowey, and half a dozen stalwart blue-jackets might have been seen tramping along the old railway track to Trelasco, one carrying a crowbar, another a carpenter's basket. And under the autumn stars that night in the woods of Glenaveril, while Vansittart Crowther slept the sleep of the just man who payeth his twenty shillings in the pound, there rose the sound of a sea-song and the cheery chorus of the sailors, with a rhythmic accompaniment of hammering; and lo, when the October morning visited those yellowing woods, and when Mr. Crowther's gamekeeper went on his morning round, the gate at either end of the church path was wrenched off its hinges, and was lying on the ground. Staple and bolt, padlock and iron hinges, were lying among the dewy dock-leaves and the yellowing fern; and there was free passage between the village of Trelasco and the House of God.

Vansittart Crowther went to Plymouth by the first train that could convey him, and there consulted the lawyer most in renown among the citizens; and that gentleman, after due thought

and consideration, informed him that the closing of such an old-established right of way as that of the church-path was more than any landowner durst attempt. Whatever omission there might be in the title-deeds, he had bought the estate subject to that old right of way, which had been enjoyed by the parish from time immemorial. He could no more shut it off than he could wall out the sky.

"But I can punish the person who pulled the locks off my gates, I conclude?" said Mr. Crowther, swelling with indignation.

"That, of course, is a distinct outrage, for which you may obtain redress, if you can find out who did it."

"Very little difficulty about that, I take it. The act must have been instigated by the writer of that impertinent letter."

He pointed to Martin Disney's letter, lying open on the solicitor's table.

"Very probably. But you will have to be sure of proving his share in the act if you mean to take proceedings against him."

Vansittart Crowther was furious. How was he to bring the responsibility of this outrage home

to anybody, when the deed had been done in the dead of night, and no mortal eye had seen the depredators at their felonious work? His locks and bolts and hinges, the best of their kind that Sheffield could supply, had been mocked at and made as naught; and all his dumb dogs of serving men and women had been lying in their too comfortable beds, and had heard never a sound of hammer clinking or crowbar striking on iron. There had not been so much as a kitchen-maid afflicted with the toothache, and lying wakeful, to overhear a sound of that villainous deed.

Mr. Crowther sent for the police authorities of Fowey, and set his wrongs before them.

"I will give fifty pounds reward to the man who will get me credible evidence as to the person who planned that outrage," he said. And next day there were bills pasted against divers doors at Fowey and Trelasco, against the Mechanics' Institute, and against that curious old oaken door of a mediæval building opposite the club, which may once have been a donjon, and in sundry other conspicuous places, beginning with "Whereas," and ending with Vansittart Crowther's signature.

Nothing came of this splendid offer, though there were plenty of people in the district to whom fifty pounds would have seemed a fortune. Whether no one had seen the crew of the *Vendetta* landing or re-embarking in the night-time, or whether some wakeful eyes had seen, whose owners would not betray the doers of a deed done in a good cause, still remains unknown. Captain Hulbert was enchanted at the speedy success of the conspiracy, and went to church next Sunday by the now notorious foot-path, along which an unusual procession of villagers came streaming in the crisp, clear air, proud to assert a right that had been so boldly maintained by their unnamed but not unknown champion. Every one felt very sure that the flinging open of the gates had been somehow brought about by Martin Disney—Martin, whose grandfather they could some of them remember, when he came home after the long war with the French, and took up his abode in an old house among the hills, and married a fair young wife. That had happened sixty-five years ago; but there were those in the village who could remember handsome Major Disney, with only one

arm, and a face bronzed by the sun that shines on the banks of the Douro.

Captain Hulbert went by the church-path that morning, although it took him ever so far out of his way. He wanted to walk to church with the Disney family, in order to talk over their victory; and the Disneys seemed to-day to resolve themselves into one; and that one was Allegra Leland; for she and the captain walked ahead and discoursed gaily, perhaps in too exultant and worldly a vein for pious church people; but at worst their exultation was in a good cause; for the horn of the lowly was exalted, and the pride of the rich man was brought low.

"Do you think he will be at church?" asked Allegra, the pronoun standing for Mr. Crowther.

"Of course he will. He must brazen out the position. He will be there, no doubt, gnashing his teeth behind his prayer-book. If angry looks could kill, you and I would be as dead as Ananias and Sapphira before the end of the service."

"Poor, silly man, why did he want to shut up the footpath?" speculated Allegra.

"Only to show his importance—to make him-

self felt in the neighbourhood. They wouldn't have him for their representative, in spite of his money, and his grand Church and State principles, and all the Primrose Leaguing of his womankind: and so he turns savage and wants to make himself disagreeable."

Yes, it was true that Mr. Crowther had stood for Lostwithiel on three separate occasions, and with equal unsuccess on each. This may have embittered him. If the anger of slighted beauty is a furious thing, no less bitter is the sting of wounded vanity in man.

And then the parson and the doctor had told Mr. Crowther that he could not close his wood against the public; an all-sufficient reason why he should make the attempt.

The Crowther family were in the chancel pew in full force. Allegra thought she detected signs of distress in Mrs. Crowther's countenance; but the daughters went through the service with their noses in the air, and were more than usually vivacious and conversational among their friends between the church-porch and the landau which bore them away to Glenaveril, and the sumptuous boredom of Sunday luncheon.

Merrily went the short autumn days on board the *Vendetta*, and merrily went the tea-drinkings and talk in the drawing-room at the Angler's Nest. Mrs. Disney did not often join the yachting expeditions east or west. The sea made her head ache, she told them; but Mrs. Baynham, who loved pleasure of any kind, was always ready to chaperon Allegra, and Isola welcomed the wanderers to the cheery fireside and the friendly five-o'clock tea. She spent her own days mostly in the society of her baby, with whom she seemed to hold a kind of mysterious commune. She had no idea of amusing him as the nurse had, none of those conventional tricks and movements which are offered to generation after generation of infants; but the child would lie in her lap for hours while she sang to him in her low sweet voice the French songs she had learnt in her early girlhood—songs that the peasants of Brittany sing, some of them—and others of a somewhat loftier strain. She would sing him little bits of Mozart, those immortal melodies, of inexhaustible sweetness and ineffable pathos, music wedded with smiles and tears, melody interwoven with such melting

tenderness as thrills the coldest heart. There was a gentle happiness in these solitary hours which the young mother spent with her child; and Martin Disney, coming into the room unawares, sometimes stood for a minute or so in loving contemplation of that domestic picture —the young fair face with its long oval form and delicate features; the pensive gravity of the large violet eyes, and mournful droop of the thin, flower-like lips. He had seen such a face on canvas, the ideal Madonna of Raffaelle, with just that subdued blonde colouring and pale auburn hair, and just that thoughtful expression.

His heart swelled with gladness and gratitude as he contemplated mother and son. Yes, the child had made all things well in his home.

Those aching doubts which he felt as he watched beside his wife's sick-bed had vanished like clouds before the sun. Who could doubt the happiness of the mother, absorbed in her first-born? Who could doubt the love of the wife, looking up at her husband with such tender welcome as he bent over her shoulder to take the little folded fist in his, unfold the crumpled fingers, and press them to his lips?

"You are very fond of him, Martin?" she asked, with an often repeated inquiry, knowing what the answer would be.

"Fond of him! After you he is all that I have in this world—except Allegra, who will float away into a world of her own by-and-by, and belong to us no more."

"After me! He ought to be first, Martin—your son, your heir, your second self in the days to come. He ought to have the first place in your heart, Martin, for he is your future."

"No one is first but you."

He dropped the little crumpled hand, and took his wife's head between his hands, and lifted the fair young forehead, looking down at it fondly before he stooped to kiss the soft clustering hair and pencilled brows and ivory temples, with more than a lover's passion.

END OF VOL. I.

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